

KEIDAN MEMORIAL (YIZKOR) BOOK

KEIDAN

MEMORIAL (YIZKOR) BOOK

קיידאן

ספר זכרון

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First published, mainly in Hebrew, in Tel Aviv 1977, by the Keidan Association in Israel with the participation of the Committees in South Africa and the USA.

Edited by Josef Chrust

Editing Board: Pesach Chitrin (Weitzer), Arie Ginzburg, Zalman Gladstone, Adv Shmuel Hadari, Chaim Landsberg, Baruch Ofek ((Upnicki) and Adv Shimon Shibolet

Reprinted in 2018 in English by the Keidan Association in Israel and the USA. Translations edited by Aryeh Leonard Shcherbakov and Andrew Cassel of the Keidan Association in Israel and the USA. Compiled by David Solly Sandler

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Title:	Keidan Memorial (Yizkor) Book
Editor	Josef Chrust
Author	The book is made up of numerous articles and authors
Edition	2nd edition First print 1977.
ISBN:	9780994619266 (paperback)

Subjects: Jews--Keidan--Lithuania--History.
Jews--Israel, South Africa and USA--History
Holocaust, Jewish (1941-1945)--Lithuania.
Lithuania--Emigration and immigration.

Editors/Translators	Aryeh Leonard Shcherbakov Andrew Cassel
Compiler	Sandler, David Solly

This edition first published June 2018

Every effort has been made to incorporate correct information, dates, statistics and photos. The publisher regrets any errors and omissions, and invites readers to contribute their up-to-date or additional relevant information to:

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Photo on cover: The "Tarbut" Hebrew primary school.

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KEIDAN MEMORIAL (YIZKOR) BOOK
PREFACE

At first glance this book is like all the other hundreds of books published since the end of World War II in memory of the Jewish *shtetl* in Eastern Europe that had been and is no more. Keidan itself was one of those thousands of towns in the old Pale. Small towns with all their lights and shadows, their geographical and human landscape, their spiritual climate, the Jewish people who worked and toiled all week like busy ants in order to bring food to the family. With its odd and strange figures, whose daily life and golden dreams of the redemption of the nation and salvation of the world. In short, a *shtetl*, like all *shtetlech*.

Even so, Keidan was worthy of an eternal monument in form of a book, which would tell the new generations about their fathers and mothers, who were the public workers and honorary officers, the righteous women, students of the Torah and ordinary people, rabbis and judges and unknown soldiers, each of whom made his contribution, with or without knowledge, to the chain of generations of the ancient nation.

Yet Keidan was also outstanding, and we are even allowed to say of a special lineage, with the legends pertaining to the beginning of the Jewish settlement in Keidan, the pride of its Jews, the consciousness of self-importance of its sons who found its expression in the famous uprising against the community leaders, the efforts to appoint as its spiritual leaders the greatest rabbis in the diaspora, the special contribution made by its sons to the Jewish renaissance movement, and finally, the single revolt crowned with heroism and splendor of one of its sons within the mass grave. All this demanded its commemoration for the future generations.

The birth pangs of this book were hard and prolonged. Yet it is natural, and it doesn't lessen its importance, if we shall consider that the whole book is a product of the common effort of the town's people who invested in it the most important element – love. Actually, no scientific research works have been included in this book, but memories which sometimes reach the height of true art, and – what is even more important – they distinguish themselves with a clean and refined truth, as it was seen with the eyes of the writers. They described all they had seen in a quiet, restrained way, without any trimmings, yet, for all that these memories speak to the reader with an unusual strength of expression.

One of the main goals of the book is the commemoration of the period of the Holocaust. Very few people have remained from that terrible period. Very few of those who had seen the terror from close up saved themselves by a miracle, and it is their duty to tell about their personal experiences. There are others who succeeded to escape from the Holocaust and to spend the war in wanderings in distant places or in fighting the cruel enemy. Each one told, in his own language, the facts as he knew them. More than once the book contains different versions of the same events. This fact, which can happen in historical scientific works too, will no doubt be forgiven in a book which was written not by historians, but by men who drew their descriptions not from documents in an ivory tower of a library, but from their own memories, that were tortured in the ghettos, concentration camps and forests. This is however the naked truth, rough and not polished, a truth solid like rock from which eternal monuments are shaped.

Still, this book is more than an eternal monument. It is an effort to return to the *shtetl* in its happy moments as well as in its last hours, to be together with the father and the mother, with the brothers and sisters, at the Shabbat table as well as at the mass grave on the fateful day, to isolate oneself within Keidan, one of the precious stones in the lost crown whose name was Eastern European Jewry.

There is no relief in this book for the wounded soul of a son of Keidan, but there is in it a eulogy and a *kaddish* which was not said on the grave of the martyrs, and which will be said now whenever we shall take this book in our hands.

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The History of Keidan

קיידאן בתהפוכות העתים

The City of Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp. 13-14*
From "Evreiskaia entsiklopedia" Vol 9, p. 410-411[1]

Translated by Aryeh Leonard Shcherbakov.

Keidany (Caiodunum, Civitas Caiodunensis, in the Samogitian (Žemaičių) language Kwiedajna, in Lithuanian – Kédainiai). During the period of Polish rule, part of the Samogitian principality. Although Keidany became an important trade center in the reign of Sigismund III, it especially began to develop after being transferred to the Radziwill princely dynasty (1614).

Within the structure of Jewish communal administration, from the 3rd quarter of the 17th century Keidany was the principal town of one of the three counties comprising *Medinat Zamut,* as the Samogitian area was known. Jews appeared here in 16th century, and in the middle of that century there was already a small Jewish community.

In regulations added to the Magdeburg Law by Janusz Radziwill in 1647, the sixth paragraph states that "executives will be elected by all citizens, regardless of their nationality and religion." By that time Jews were already significant in the town's economic life. They were engaged in winemaking, credit operations and also crafts. Jewish craftsmen were organized in special guilds, having the same responsibilities as non-Jewish guilds. Jewish craftsmen, when members of common guilds, were free from dues related to Christian rituals. Conflicts arising between such guilds and Jewish craftsmen who were their members were resolved in the palace court, to which all Keidan Jews were liable in all legal cases and complaints.

Special residential areas were designated for Jews, who were forbidden to purchase or rent houses elsewhere in the town. Jewish creditors could recover debts from debtors' moveable property, and if that were insufficient, from houses, but only on condition that these be resold to Christians. After becoming citizens of the town, Jews and Christians alike had a year and six weeks to purchase dwellings in the areas designated for them, or they lost the right to trade. Nevertheless, some Jews purchased Christian houses or took them as collateral. This was noted by a committee appointed by Prince Radziwill in 1666 to review the privileges of Keidan citizens.

Among other matters, the committee declared that "Jews must be present at all meetings dealing with taxes, in order to know their obligations and the purpose of such taxes." Also, "Jews must hold military exercises on a set date each year under the supervision of municipal officials, to determine how many Jews can be called to arms, if needed, to defend the town. Jews must attend these exercises in person and may not send Christians in their place. They are obliged, along with Christians, to participate in the night watch, but may hire workers to substitute for them."

The following streets, among others, were used as places of residence for Jews: Old Market Street, Pesmilsky [Smilga] Street, Jews' Street and one side of Crooked Alley. In 1665 the estate of Keidan was leased to one Wolf Isaacovich, who had the authority to judge and punish town residents. To commemorate the persecution of Jews in 1698, Yosef ben Uri from Kobrin composed a penitential prayer.

As a result of wars with Sweden at the beginning of 18th century, the economic situation of the Jews worsened and they sank into debt. One creditor, Gursky, to whom Jews owed several thousand złotys, had all the Jews locked in their synagogue during Shabbat prayers on Saturday, July 30, 1707. In 1766, a census found the Jewish community of Keidan had 501 taxpayers.

Jewish communities in the district continued to hold regional congresses even after the Lithuanian *Vaad*[2] was cancelled in 1764. It is known that congresses took place in 1778 and

[1] Published in 16 volumes between 1908 and 1913 by the Brockhaus and Efron Publishing House, St. Petersburg.
[2] A congress of Lithuanian Jewish communities, active from 1520 to 1764.

1782. The Rabbi of Brest appeared at the last one to confirm the decisions made there. The position of chief rabbi for Keidan and environs was held by prominent *Torah* scholars. The *pinkas* [record book] of the Jewish tailors' guild of Keidan, including its charter, was preserved by S. M. Dubnov in St. Petersburg.

Keidan is now [1913] part of Kovno province. In the census of 1847, the Keidan Jewish community consisted of 2987 souls. In 1897 there were 6113 inhabitants in Keidan, of whom 3733 were Jews. In 1910 there was one *Talmud-Torah*.

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Keidan and Its Jews *Keidan Yizkor Book p 15*

from "Yahadut Lita, its history in pictures"[3] p.123. Translated by Bella Golubchik

Keidan, an administrative center for its district, was one of Lithuania's ancient cities. The history of the Jewish community in Keidan begins in the 15th century. In 1495, in the time of Prince Alexander, the Jews were expelled by his decree, but after some years, in 1503, they were allowed to return and Jewish settlement began to develop and take root there.

Prince Radziwill gave the Jews full rights. Keidan acquired a reputation in the Jewish world for its eminent personalities and great rabbis, and became famous as a "place of Torah and education." It had a bustling, active Jewish life, with a yeshiva, synagogues, schools, organizations and youth movements, a people's bank and charitable organizations. The large printing house owned by Movshovitz and Kagan was among the most outstanding Jewish publishers in the country, specializing in religious books and works by rabbis and scholars.

Many of the Jews in Keidan were vegetable growers, and "Keidan cucumbers" appeared on tables throughout Lithuania.

Among the rabbis of the city and its great men were: the *gaon* Rabbi Moshe Margalit, the author of "*Pnei Moshe*," a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud; the *gaon* Rabbi David Katzenellenbogen, the *gaon* Rabbi Abraham Shimon Troib, and the last rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber, hy"d[4], a renowned Torah scholar and chairman of the Rabbinic Association of Lithuania, who compiled the books, "*Nishmat Chaim*" and "*Yeriyot Shlomo*"; the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Shimon Dubiansky, hy"d, who perished in Dachau; the rabbinical judge Rabbi Aharon Galin, hy"d, who was Rabbi Feinsilber's son-in-law.

The Vilna Gaon spent a short time in Keidan and learned Torah from Rabbi David Katzenellenbogen. Prior to the First World War, the Jewish population numbered seven thousand; and before the Holocaust there were four thousand souls. Many Jews from Keidan emigrated to South Africa, America and Eretz-Israel. The Jews of Keidan were massacred on August 15 1941[5] near the town and were buried at that same place. The heroic death of Tzadok Shlapobersky is worthy of note. Witnesses tell how he dragged a Nazi commander into the death pit and smashed the skull of a Lithuanian murderer, who was collaborating with the Germans.

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[3] Published by "Mossad Harav Kook", Jerusalem, 1959

[4] May God avenge his blood

[5] The actual date was August 28, 1941

Keidan in the 17th Century *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 16-18*

From "The Deluge": an historical novel of Poland, Sweden, and Russia by Henryk Sienkiewicz; Published 1893.

Translated from the Polish by Jeremiah Curtin.

The night was clear and warm ; the stars twinkled by thousands in the sky. Dragging on at a walk, they slept sweetly till, when day began to break, Pan Michael woke.

"Gentlemen, Open your eyes ; Kyedani is in sight ! "cried he.

"What, where? "asked Zagloba. "Kyedani, where? "

"Off there! The towers are visible."

"A respectable sort of place," said Pan Stanislav.

"Very considerable, "answered Volodyovski; "and of this you will be able to convince yourselves better in the daytime."

"But is this the inheritance of the prince?"

"Yes. Formerly it belonged to the Kishkis, from whom the father of the present prince received it as dowry with Panna Anna Kishki, daughter of the voevoda of Vityebsk.' In all Jmud there is not such a well-ordered place, for the Radzivills do not admit Jews, save by permission to each one. The meads here are celebrated."

Zagloba opened his eyes.

"But do people of some politeness live here? What is that immensely great building on the eminence? "

"That is the castle just built during the rule of Yanush."

"Is it fortified? "

"No, but it is a lordly residence. It is not fortified, for no enemy has ever entered these regions since the time of the Knights of the Cross. That pointed steeple in the middle of the town belongs to the parish church built by the Knights of the Cross in pagan times ; later it was given to the Calvinists, but the priest Kobylinski won it back for the Catholics through a lawsuit with Prince Krishtof."

"Praise be to God for that!"

Thus conversing, they arrived near the first cottages of the suburbs. Meanwhile it grew brighter and brighter in the world, and the sun began to rise. The knights looked with curiosity at the new place, and Pan Yolodyovski continued to speak, —

"This is Jew street, in which dwell those of the Jews who have permission to be here. Following this street, one comes to the market. Oho! People are up already, and beginning to come out of the houses. See, a crowd of horses before the forges, and attendants not in the Radzivill colors! There must be some meeting in Kyedani. It is always full of nobles and high personages here, and sometimes they come from foreign countries, for this is the capital for heretics from all Jmud, who under the protection of the Radzivills carry on their sorcery and superstitious practices. That is the market-square. See what a clock is on the town-house! There is no better one to this day in Dantzig. And that which looks like a church with four towers is a Helvetic (Calvinistic) meeting-house, in which every Sunday they blaspheme God; and farther on the Lutheran church. You think that the townspeople are Poles or Lithuanians, — not at all. Real Germans and Scots, but more Scots. The Scots are splendid infantry, and cut terribly with battle-axes. The prince has also one Scottish regiment of volunteers of Kyedani. Ei, how many wagons with packs on the market-square! Surely there is some meeting. There are no inns in the town; acquaintances stop with acquaintances, and nobles go to the castle, in which there are rooms tens of ells long, intended for guests only.

There they entertain, at the prince's expense, everyone honorably, even if for a year; there are people who stay there all their lives."

"It is a wonder to me that lightning has not burned that Calvinistic meeting-house," said Zagloba.

"But do you not know that that has happened? In the centre between the four towers was a cap-shaped cupola; on a time such a lightning-flash struck this cupola that nothing remained of it. In the vault underneath lies the father of Prince Boguslav, Yanush — he who joined the mutiny against Sigismund III. His own haiduk laid open his skull, so that he died in vain, as he had lived in sin."

"But what is that broad building which looks like a walled tent?" asked Pan Yan.

"That is the paper-mill founded by the prince; and at the side of it is a printing-office, in which heretical books are printed."

"Tfu!"said Zagloba, "a pestilence on this place, where a man draws no air into his stomach but what is heretical! Lucifer might rule here as well as Radzivill."

"Gracious sir," answered Volodyovski, "abuse not Radzivill, for perhaps the country will soon owe its salvation to him."

They rode farther in silence, gazing at the town and wondering at its good order, for the streets were all paved with stone, which was at that period a novelty.

Afjer they had ridden through the market-square and the street of the castle, they saw on an eminence the lordly residence recently built by Prince Yanush, — not fortified, it is true, but surpassing in size not only palaces but castles. The great pile was on a height, and looked on the town lying, as it were, at its feet. From both sides of the main building extended at right angles two lower wings, which formed a gigantic courtyard, closed in front with an iron railing fastened with long links. In the middle of the railing towered a strong walled gate; on it the arms of the Radzivills and the arms of the town of Kyedani, representing an eagle's foot with a black wing on a golden field, and at the foot a horseshoe with three red crosses. In front of the gate were sentries and Scottish soldiers keeping guard for show, not for defence.

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The Jewish Settlement of Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 19-40*
Boruch Chaim Cassel

Originally published in 1930 by the Keidaner Association of New York.
Translated by Meyer Dwass and A. Cassel.

FOREWORD

Framed within this brief account of Lithuania's general history the reader will find the history of Keidan – the non-Jewish city with its Jewish center. The reader will see how, due to special conditions, the Jewish community in Keidan developed into one of the most significant communities in its region. Other circumstances later led Keidan to decline, like many other Jewish communities in Lithuania. But during its flowering the Jewish community of Keidan played an important part in Lithuanian Jewish history, and has a distinguished place in the story of Jews from that time. The influence that Keidan exerted on the young genius who later became known as the Vilna *Gaon* is by itself enough to show the city's importance.

As a Keidaner of at least the fourth generation, the author undertook to investigate the city's history, using a number of historical sources, and to present, so to speak, Keidan's noble lineage. He thus feels he has done his duty to his birthplace and to his fellow Keidaners, while contributing to the general history of Lithuanian Jewry.

Rosh Hashana Eve, 5691 /
September 22, 1930
Sea Gate, New York Harbor

I. FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE START OF THE 13TH CENTURY

In ancient times, the dense forests of northeastern Europe from the Neman River to the Baltic Sea were a hidden region, filled with bewitching secrets. Parts of the forest remained unvisited by humans for centuries at a time. Gigantic oaks stood with trunks so large that five men with arms outstretched could not encircle them. The branches were so thick that in summer the sun's rays were blocked out, and in winter no snow reached the ground.

These trackless woods of birch, pine, alder, ash and other trees formed a natural environment that supported large populations of animals, including wild horses, deer, bears, wolves, foxes, hares, squirrels and more. Millions of birds of all sizes filled the air with their cries in both summer and winter. Every sort of fish, from huge pike to tiny roach, filled the rivers. Hunters and fishermen found a true paradise in this region, which is called Lithuania.

The early inhabitants had no idea of their origins, although their legends said they had come from farther east. Their language showed no links to those of the surrounding populations – Germans and Slavs – although it contained traces of Sanskrit, the sacred tongue of the Hindus.

Strongly built, innocent like all children of nature, these inhabitants – the Lithuanians – occupied themselves mainly with hunting and fishing, and eventually with farming and livestock. They built no cities, nor even large villages, but lived in small, widely dispersed hamlets that allowed them to hunt and fish, till small patches of land and tend a few cattle. There were few links between these settlements; a stranger wandering the forests found his way from one to another only by listening for the barking of a dog or the crowing of a rooster. Practically no footpaths connected one tiny hamlet with another.

Long after most of Europe had adopted Christianity, the Lithuanians, like their neighbors the Prussians, remained pagans. The lightning-bolt, that most powerful utterance of nature, became the symbol of the mightiest ruler of the heavens, their greatest god, whom they named Perkunas. There were also many lesser gods with various names, mostly related to

fire. Life was under the complete control of priests, who occasionally made human sacrifices at their altars.

Isolated in their deep forests from most other European peoples, and as true children of nature, the Lithuanians tended to be good-spirited and industrious. Despite their impressive statures and strong bodies they were not warlike, nor did they undertake grand projects. In this manner they lived happily and independently for centuries.

Christian missionaries began to appear in Lithuania by the end of the tenth century, but they attracted little notice at first. Yet they persisted, mocking the pagan gods and the people's religion, so that eventually the Lithuanians lost patience and began to attack the missionaries.

In time the natural wealth of Lithuania aroused the greed of Germanic warrior-monks – the Knights Templar – who entered the region with sword and cross to spread Christianity. In about the middle of the twelfth century the Templars built their first border fortress – the *Vogelsang*[6]. This began a series of warlike invasions of Lithuania. Until 1410, when the strength of the crusader knights was finally broken[7], the Lithuanians were unable to put down their swords. Day and night, summer and winter, the Lithuanian forest-dwellers had to fight off the attacking knights.

Yet the centuries of external threats and military struggles forced the Lithuanians to unify themselves, adopting a common language, customs and religion. Their priests led them in their battles against the crusader monks, attempting to sustain their heathen religion against the onslaught of Christianity.

II. FROM 1226 TO 1417

The first great Lithuanian ruler was Rinkoldis, who assumed power in about 1226. With him began a great new epoch. The German crusader knights had been vanquished and Lithuania began to grow in all directions. Rinkoldis' son, the ruler Mindaugas, was a great hunter and warrior who had halted the penetration of Western Europe by Ghengis Khan's Tatars.[8]

In an effort to end the plundering attacks by the German crusaders, Mindaugas sent an emissary to the pope in Rome, offering to accept Christianity on condition that the knights leave his people in peace. Mindaugas became a Christian, and the Pope ordered the crusaders to stop their invasions of Lithuania. But the knights found the plunder of Lithuania too profitable; they ignored the order and continued robbing and destroying as before.

Mindaugas could not tolerate this, and in great anger he renounced his Christian baptism, and the land returned to paganism. He had the German crusaders who had been captured burned with great pomp and ceremony as sacrifices to the Lithuanian gods, to placate them for the short-lived dalliance with Christianity. He did the same to those knights captured in later wars. In this way, Lithuanian history unfolded as a struggle against Christianity.

Lithuania became truly great and important under the reign of Gediminas, who had ties to many Russian princes. Through many successful wars and large inheritances, he expanded Lithuania far into southern and eastern Europe. He also captured Kiev, but Lithuania's center remained around the Neman and the other rivers that flow into it.

A pagan himself, Gediminas was however tolerant of other beliefs, and he permitted other religions to build many prayer houses and churches. His daughter became the queen of Poland when the Poles sought an alliance with by-then powerful Lithuania. Gediminas fell in battle with the German knights, as did his famous, heroic son Algirdas. But Algirdas left many sons, among them the ruler Jagiello.

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[6] The name derives from the large number of birds in the Lithuanian forests.

[7] *Translators' note: The Battle of Grunwald (Lith: Žalgiris) was fought on July 15, 1410.*

[8] It is not true, as is commonly assumed, that this was done by the Russians.

In 1386, when Jagiello ruled, he married the beautiful queen of Poland, Jadwiga, and thus unified Lithuania with Poland. As it turned out, the smaller Poland swallowed the larger Lithuania, both physically and spiritually, thus becoming a great political power.

As a precondition of the marriage, Jagiello and the whole Lithuanian nation with him had to convert to Roman Catholicism, in exchange for which he would receive the Polish crown.

A multitude of Catholic priests and monks flooded Lithuania. Its pagan temples were converted to Catholic churches and cloisters, and hundreds of Lithuanians were baptized. Paganism disappeared as a national religion in the last corner of Europe, and the Lithuanians were condemned to political decline.

Along with religion, those with power and influence in Lithuania adopted the Polish language and culture, thus distancing themselves from the Lithuanian masses, their customs and language. Lithuania gradually disappeared as a nation, becoming a province of Poland. The nobility spoke Polish and were Polish patriots, leaving peasants as the only Lithuanian speakers. Because of this the Lithuanian peasants grew more estranged from the lords than did the Polish peasants, who at least spoke the same language as their nobles. Lithuanian, which for so many centuries had been the language of Europe's only pagans, was marked as the accursed language of slaves.

In fact, despite Lithuania's official conversion to Christianity, paganism did not completely disappear. It persisted quietly in the hands of the powerful old priests, who hid in the deep forests. Sacrifices to the ancient gods still took place along the banks of the large rivers. Roman Catholic clergy had many bloody encounters with the heathen priests, until finally the last "eternal flame" on a pagan altar was extinguished in 1417.

The Lithuanians gave up everything for Christianity: Their pride as a mighty nation, their political independence, their unique civilization, their forests, fields and rivers. They lost their personal freedom and were turned into a powerless rabble.

III. FROM THE MID-14th TO THE START OF THE 15th CENTURY

In the middle of the 14th century, during the height of the attacks on Lithuania by the German crusaders, a small village was established by the Neviazhe [Nevėžis] River, near its broadest point, where the Abele [Obele] creek flows in from the south, on the left, and the Datnovke [Dotnuvėlė] and Smilga creeks enter from the north on the right.[9]

The village was flanked by hills to the east and west; to the south a panorama of glorious fields and woods spread out from the banks of the Abele and Neviazhe. To the northeast lay a dense pine forest with hundred-year-old trees.

At the beginning of the forest, right by the Neviazhe, was a steep hill suitable for an altar to the gods. An eternal flame, called "*znitsh*," was lit on the hill and maintained by the priests and the "*videlotkes*" – maidens who attended the priests and made certain the fire was never extinguished.

It is not known exactly when the village was first settled, but it is known that when crusaders passed through there in 1379, headed to Shat [Šeta] via Labunova, the unfortified hamlet offered no resistance, and so they hardly noticed it.

At first the village bore the name "Kazdan," after its founder, who came from Kvidangen in Courland. Later the name changed to "Kedainiai," in Lithuanian, or "Kwiedajna" in the

[9] Specifically, the location is 55ø, 17' North latitude and 23ø, 58' East longitude, 49 *verst* from Kovno [Kaunas], 56 *verst* from Ponevezh [Panevėžys], 61 *verst* from Rasein [Raseiniai] *[1 verst = 1.067 kilometer.]*

Zamut[10] Lithuanian dialect. In old archived documents it is called "Caiodunum" and "Civitas Caiodunensis." In Russian and Polish it is called "Keidany." In Yiddish – Keidan.

* * *

The village grew. The temple, which had been built on the hill to the great god Perkunas, attracted a growing population, and Keidan became a city that drew the attention of the crusaders. There were attacks on Keidan, which were heroically repelled, just as in other parts of Lithuania. When Lithuania turned to Roman Catholicism under Jagiello, the crusaders succeeded in entrenching themselves in Keidan and built a Christian church on the hill where Perkunas' temple had stood.

When Jagiello joined Lithuania to Poland, he was forced to appoint his cousin Vytautas [Witold, 1388-1430] as grand duke of Lithuania. Under his regime, in 1403, the church on the hill was completed. It was considered one of the most splendid churches in Lithuania, with four great inner columns and a secret underground passage to the Neviazhe River. It is likely that crusaders installed the passage when they first built the church as a fortress to defend against the pagan Lithuanians.

Vytautas was a very able leader, devoted to the Lithuanian people and language. He contributed greatly to the expansion of Keidan. In historical documents from the early fifteenth century Keidan begins to be mentioned quite often, and is attributed to the domain of Pyotr Shukshte.

IV. FROM THE 8TH CENTURY UNTIL 1503

It is not known precisely when Jews settled in Lithuania. There are hints that already in the eighth century Jews were in some parts of the country. But in the twelfth century, Jews began to migrate to Lithuania because of persecutions by crusaders in various parts of Europe. Pagan Lithuania was then the only secure place for them. Ariogala was founded in 1262, Golshan [Alšėnai] and Kovno [Kaunas] in 1280, Telsh [Telšiai], Vilna [Vilnius] and Trok [Trakai] in 1320; all these cities attracted oppressed Jews from western and southern Europe.

After Gediminas' victory over the Russians and the capture of Kiev in 1320, many Jews from southern Russia, and particularly from Crimea, settled in Lithuania and contributed to the development of the new cities. Gediminas encouraged their immigration with his noteworthy tolerance of all religions.

In 1388, after the unification of Lithuania with Poland, Grand Duke Vytautas granted a charter to the Lithuanian Jews giving them the same rights as the other peoples under his protection. Under this charter, Jews had autonomy in matters pertaining to religion and property, while in criminal and other matters they were subject to their local authorities. Major cases would be decided in the grand duke's court.

Personal freedom and the ability to engage in business helped the Lithuanian Jews make great strides in commerce and landownership. Wealthy Jews lent money on interest and became collectors for various enterprises, such as the sale of alcoholic spirits. Government taxes were not proportionally higher for Jews than for Christians.

In general the situation for Jews in Lithuania was much better than it was in Poland or Germany. In Germany Jews were "chamber servants" of the ruling classes, whereas in Lithuania they were free citizens.

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Jews were already in Keidan by the fifteenth century, attracted to this growing city by its yearly market fair. In 1490 Keidan was given to the Lithuanian-Russian Kishko family by the

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[10] *Translator's note: The region of western Lithuania, labeled Samogitia on many maps, is known as Žemaitija in Lithuanian, Zmudz in Polish, Zhmud in Russian, and Zamut or Zamet in Yiddish and Hebrew.*

Polish king Casimir IV, as a reward for exceptional contributions to the fatherland. The Jewish community in Keidan began to properly organize itself after Casimir's death in 1492, when his son Albert became king of Poland and his younger son Alexander became grand duke of Lithuania.

At the beginning of his reign, Alexander confirmed all the rights and privileges that the Lithuanian Jews had obtained from the previous rulers. Keidan expanded and its commerce attracted more Jews. Then, like a sudden thunderclap, in April 1495 came the decree from Grand Duke Alexander, ordering all Jews out of Lithuania, with their possessions left behind. The small, young Jewish community of Keidan was ruined, and sent to wander along with those from other parts of Lithuania.

Many Jews relocated to Crimea, but most resettled in Poland, near the Lithuanian border, with the permission of the Polish King Albert. After Albert's death Alexander became king of Poland. In 1503 he issued a new decree allowing Jews to return to Lithuania and reclaim their possessions. Only part of the Keidan community returned. It took years for the Keidan Jewish community to become viable and to grow again.

V. FROM THE START OF THE 16TH CENTURY UNTIL 1638

Early in the sixteenth century, the doctrine of John Calvin, known as Calvinism, began to spread through Europe. This was a reformist movement that was outspokenly democratic, unlike Catholicism, which was favored by the aristocratic classes.

Calvinism spread from France to many parts of Europe, including Poland and Lithuania. In 1560, Michael Radziwill became the first Lithuanian ruler to accept Calvinism. The Radziwills resided in Keidan, which thus became a Calvinist center. Michael Radziwill's influence was so strong that the Catholic church was converted to a Calvinist house of worship.

During the reign of Sigismund III (1587-1632) Calvinism spread extensively through Poland, naturally provoking strong opposition from the Jesuits. The leader of the Calvinists in Poland and Lithuania was Grand Duke Janusz Radziwill, whose court was based in Keidan.

The struggle between the Calvinists and the Jesuits was very bitter. One Sunday, as Janusz Radziwill walked with his family from church, he was attacked by his own manservant, whom the Jesuits had bribed, and who split open his skull with a sword.

In 1590 Sigismund III granted Keidan administrative and judicial independence under the "Magdeburg rights."[11] Keidan prospered under self-rule and became the region's commercial center. Fairs took place three times a year, the largest one on the Christian holiday of Epiphany. In 1614 Christopher Radziwill, Grand Duke of Lithuania and *voivode* [governor] of Vilna, married the beautiful Anna, the daughter of Stanislav Kishko, and received from his father-in-law half of Keidan as a dowry. After a short time Radziwill bought the remaining half and made Keidan the residence of the Radziwills. Thus began Keidan's era of greatness and significance.

As the home of the Lithuanian grand duke, who also led the Calvinist movement, Keidan naturally attracted many Calvinist scholars who were persecuted elsewhere in Europe. In 1625 Christopher Radziwill built the first Calvinist gymnasium, which later grew into a lyceum and had an extensive library. Michael Radziwill's 1560 seizure of the Catholic church, which he had converted to a Calvinist church, prompted a lengthy lawsuit that lasted until 1627 when the Polish *sejm* [parliament] ruled in favor of a Catholic priest named Kabilinski. Christopher Radziwill was forced to return the church to the Catholics and pay a fine of 12,000 *zlotys*.

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[11] *Translators' note: Under the Magdeburg laws, developed in 13th century Saxony, municipalities could administer their own affairs, including law courts.*

At the same time, however, the citizens of Keidan succeeded in having a law passed which forbade the building of additional Catholic churches and cloisters in Keidan. This law lasted as long as the Calvinists were in power.

In 1626 Christopher Radziwill undertook the construction of a large Calvinist church and meeting place in Keidan, which was completed in 1629. He installed a stone memorial plaque at the altar, with a Latin inscription announcing when the church was built and by whom.

He also had the remains of his brother, Janusz Radziwill, placed in a special vault in the church's cellar, together with the sword that Janusz's servant had used to murder him. An explanatory inscription was placed on the vault. The cellar of the church became the burial place for the Radziwill family.

In 1629 the first Lutheran pastor was invited to serve a German community that had existed in Keidan for some time, called the Augsburger community. The first German-Lutheran church was built of wood in 1638, and Radziwill granted the group religious freedom.

The Russians in Keidan had a cloister of black monks, where Russian Orthodox adherents gathered for Sunday services. A number of Calvinists also migrated to Keidan from Scotland after James VI, King of Scotland, became James I, King of England, and persecutions of Calvinists there increased. Many Scots became soldiers in Radziwill's army.[12]

VI. FROM 1600 UNTIL 1640

To increase the Jewish population and thus the commerce of Keidan, Christopher Radziwill issued a decree giving Jews full citizenship rights as well as religious freedom. The decree also guaranteed that no one would lose their property or land if they chose to leave and settle in another town.

Despite Radziwill's strong desire to attract more Jews to Keidan, he was very careful to admit only those with proper letters of reference attesting to their reputations, characters and honesty. As a result, the Keidan Jews, who mainly came from Germany, tended to be learned and well-bred.[13] It is speculated that a number of Jews also came to Keidan after being expelled from Scotland, among them many weavers. As a result, the weaving industry developed strongly in Keidan. At the start of the nineteenth century, weaving in Keidan was exclusively in Jewish hands.

Grand Duke Radziwill was very receptive to the new Jewish immigrants and assigned them a special part of the city. In time they became adept in various handicrafts, and Radziwill took great pride in the many expert craftsmen. In addition, many religious scholars from Germany also immigrated, and Keidan became a center of Torah study and piety. In a short while

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[12] In the process of collecting folk songs for the anthology published by Ginzburg and Marek in 1901, the author recorded some of the oldest and best songs from Freida Heisel, the comb-maker's daughter, an elderly woman who had been bedridden with paralysis for many years. When Freida sang the song "*I Came to My Stall*" (#288 in the collection), the author could not understand how a song with such a non-Jewish theme could become a folk song in Keidan. Many years later, when the author was studying Scottish folk songs, he discovered in the collection "*Lyric Gems of Scotland*," the song "*Home Cam' Our Gudeman at E'en*", which is exactly the same song that Freida sang to him. Now, in doing research for the history of Keidan and discovering Scottish soldiers were in Keidan at the time of the Radziwills, he finally understood how a Scottish folk song could have been transformed into a Yiddish one. It may also be that Jewish refugees from Scotland who settled in Keidan were responsible for this.

[13] Keidan Jews were justifiably proud of their lineage. If someone met a Jew from Keidan on a journey and asked, "Where are you from?" he would answer proudly, "Who, me? I'm a Keidaner!" And on the word "me" he would thump his finger into his chest. Envious, other Lithuanian Jews dubbed them "Hole-in-the-chest Keidaners," the holes resulting from excessive chest-thumping.

Keidaners were also known as great scholars, who sat constantly bent over the Talmud; thus they were also called "Keidaner hunchbacks." Some wags claimed that their backs were bent due to excessive chest-thumping, which so indented their chests that it pushed their backbones out.

Keidan achieved a reputation as the most significant Jewish community in Zamut, the heart of Lithuania.

In 1623 the Jews of Lithuania and Zamut formed a "Council of the Principal Lands of Lithuania" which became a part of the "Council of the Four Lands." Within a few years after its founding, Keidan Jews were taking part in the Lithuanian council. By the time of Christopher Radziwill's death in 1640, when Keidan was inherited by his son Janusz, the Jewish community there was firmly established.

VII. FROM 1640 TO 1648

The Radziwills were closely interconnected with the princes and kings of Europe, and were accounted among the leading aristocrats of the Christian world of that time. Janusz Radziwill, moreover, was considered the richest and most educated leader in Poland, Lithuania and Zamut. As a Calvinist, he was also freer spiritually, and more democratic than the other rulers.

Having spent his youth in the capitals and royal courts of Europe, and as the richest of the Polish-Lithuanian grand dukes, he built a palace in his home city of Keidan, the capital of Zamut. The castle was built on the hill to the right of the road leading to the Januszova [Janušava] villages (which were named for him). In size, beauty and splendor, this castle surpassed many of the most important palaces and castles of Europe. It was not fortified, but looked down from its hill, over the long castle road and the city that lay, so to speak, spread out at its feet.

Two low wings extended from the sides of the main palace, forming a gigantic courtyard, which was encircled by a great iron fence. The entrance was through a large towered gate, with a shield emblazoned with the coats of arms of the Radziwill family and the city of Keidan: an eagle's black wing and claw on a golden background, holding a horseshoe bedecked with three red crosses.

An honor guard of Scottish soldiers stood in front of the gate. Janusz was served by Scottish as well as German troops. On the left side of the Januszova road across from the castle was the Calvinist court chapel, where worship services were conducted in the Lithuanian language. Nearby was the Calvinist churchyard, where to this day one can still see old gravestones with faded inscriptions going back to the time of the Radziwills. The city was not fortified, since Radziwill did not fear attack by any foe; he was the strongest ruler in Poland and Lithuania, with powerful foreign regiments as well as Polish and Lithuanian troops in his service.

Keidan teemed constantly with noblemen and diplomats from all over Europe. Very often official balls took place in the great halls, where ambassadors from royal courts were received. The townspeople would participate on especially festive occasions, such as when Janusz Radziwill would return from a military victory, which happened quite often. At those times, barrels of pitch were set around the castle and on the main roads leading to it, to be burned at night in a festive light show.[14]

Where the market place began by the Neviazhe River were piers for the sailboats that plied the river between Ponevezh [Panevėžys] and Keidan. At the entrance to the city on the other side of the river stood a stone gate.

The streets were called Long Castle Street, Court Street, Yasven Street, Smilga Street and Jewish Street. The streets, like the market square, were nicely paved and well kept, and Keidan was known as the most beautiful city in Zamut. Though Vilna was the capital of Lithuania, Keidan was the heart of Zamut because it was the residence of Janusz Radziwill,

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[14] The Keidan Jewish community also celebrated major occasions this way, which was called "burning barrels." The evening of *Shmini Atseret* [the eighth day of *Sukkof*] before the annual procession of scrolls marking *Simchat Torah*, youngsters would set up rows of barrels stacked in threes or fours and ignite them in an open field by the Smilga, not far from the synagogue.

the *hetman* [commander] of Lithuania, protector of Vilna and a grand duke of Rome, with hopes of eventually becoming king of Poland. Keidan was expanded and beautified under Janusz's rule and became a center of scholarship in Zamut. The lyceum attracted the best professors and students.

The Calvinist Janusz Radziwill tried hard to unite the Calvinist and Lutheran churches. Many conferences and discussions were held with that aim, especially after the religious dispute at Thorn in 1645.[15] These sessions brought many scholars from various parts of Europe to Keidan. Many of them settled there.[16] But Radziwill never succeeded in uniting the two churches.

A book-printing house was established in 1650, which published the first book of psalms in Lithuanian, as well as many other religious and scientific books. The largest paper factory, which served a wide region, was built several years earlier. In archives in Kovno and Vilna one can still find old printed or handwritten documents on paper bearing the watermark, "*Civitas Caiodunensis*" [City of Keidan]. A book of police-administration ordinances exists that was printed on paper from Keidan in 1653.

Calvinists, persecuted in most European cities, found a refuge in Keidan, as did the Lutherans; the German Lutheran community blossomed there. The Russians also had their own community. Only Catholics were not tolerated, and Jesuits were not even allowed into the city. The population coexisted amiably under the generosity of Radziwill's just and progressive regime. He also showed his love for his own people, the Lithuanians, and their language.

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Janusz Radziwill was particularly friendly to the Jews of Keidan, upholding all the rights and privileges that his father Christopher had granted them. In 1647 he issued regulations for the city's administration. The sixth paragraph said that voting for city officials would be open to all citizens, regardless of religion or nationality. At that time Jews were the most prominent group in the communal and economic life of the city. They were occupied as wine merchants and brewers, moneylenders, exporters, importers and farmers and in various crafts. Jewish artisans were organized into various guilds, which had the same obligations as non-Jewish guilds, except that Jewish guilds did not have to pay taxes related to Christian customs.

Judges at the castle adjudicated disputes between Jews and Christians. To collect debts from Christians, Jews were allowed to sell the debtors' houses if their other personal assets could not cover the obligations. But such houses could only be sold to other Christians. Jews and Christians alike obtained rights of residence one year and six weeks after taking an oath as citizens. Jews were represented on the city council that set fees and taxes, thus assuring that these were applied equitably to Jews and Christians. Jews participated in annual military exercises under the supervision of a city official (and the guidance of military instructors), to give city managers an accurate count of how many Jews could bear arms if needed to defend against an enemy.

It was not possible for Jews to buy their way out of the annual military exercises. However, for the obligation of serving on the night watch, which fell on all citizens, a Jew was allowed to hire a Christian guard. The names of the streets where Jews lived were: Old Market Street, Smilga Street, Jewish Street and Crooked Alley.

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[15] *Translator's note: The Colloquy of Thorn was an unsuccessful attempt by the Polish king Władysław IV to reconcile Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans.*

[16] One of the inscriptions on a monument in the German graveyard tells in Latin of a professor in the famous gymnasium, Adam Freytag, who died in 1646: "He left behind no children, but he did leave us a book about military architecture."

VIII. FROM 1648 TO 1657

In 1648 the king of Poland, Władysław IV, confirmed the Magdeburg Law for Keidan. In the same year, Radziwill permitted the first windmill to be built, on the Abele. The mill was leased to Jews. In 1648, after the death of Janusz's first wife, he married the Russian princess Maria Mogilianka. He ordered that a wooden Russian Orthodox church be built in her honor at the little market site, not far from the Skongale. This building still exists.

In 1652 the large, two-storied, brick town hall was completed on the market square. The building was one of the most beautiful in Zamut. The splendid town clock on the tower had no equal, in Danzig or anywhere in Lithuania. For three years Radziwill imposed a fee on liquor and mead[17] to cover the cost of building the town hall. The fee applied to Jews and Christians equally. A special official was appointed to collect the levy. In April, 1652 Radziwill ordered all Jewish butchers, slaughterers and those selling animals for slaughter to join together as a guild.

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The hellish flame of Bohdan Khmelnytsky's revolt, which in 1648 and 1649 consumed so many Jewish lives in Ukraine and Poland, did not affect Keidan, except that the Jewish community sent assistance to the suffering survivors, as did others in Lithuania. Jews in Keidan lived much better than did Jews in other Lithuanian cities, even when the great Russian-Polish war under Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich erupted in 1654. Until 1655, when the Russians destroyed Vilna and hundreds of Jewish communities were wiped out, Keidan, the heart of Zamut, did not share in the suffering of the Jewish communities throughout Ukraine and in most of Poland and Lithuania. But then in 1655, war broke out with Sweden.

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Karl Gustav of Sweden, who at the start of the war had little difficulty defeating the Polish king Jan Casimir, had been supported by Janusz Radziwill. All Lithuanian Calvinists saw the Swedish king, who was also a Calvinist, as a friend and savior of Lithuania. Keidan became a center for Swedish troops under the leadership of Karl Gustav's brother-in-law, Magnus de la Gardie. Janusz Radziwill personally commanded a large army of Lithuanian, Polish, Scottish and German soldiers against Jan Casimir, and was eventually surrounded in the Tykocin fortress, where he died of a heart attack in 1656.

Meanwhile Poland, which had seemed beaten, woke up, gathered its forces and called back its king, Jan Casimir, who had fled from the Swedes into Silesia. With unified and reinvigorated armies, the Poles drove back Karl Gustav and his Swedish forces.

Now things went badly for the Jews of Lithuania, Zamut and all of Poland. The Jews of Keidan suffered especially, since the Poles considered them traitors along with the Calvinist Radziwills. Many Jews fled to Koenigsburg, which was ruled by Friedrich Wilhelm, Duke of Prussia and Brandenburg, who was an uncle of Boguslav Radziwill, Janusz's cousin. The bubonic plague broke out in Keidan and wiped out many members of Keidan's Jewish community in 1657.

IX. FROM 1657 TO 1669

Boguslav Radziwill, a Calvinist, initially fought with the Swedes against Jan Casimir, but after Janusz Radziwill died and Poland began to drive the Swedes out, Radziwill and his armies went over to the Polish king's side. This allowed Radziwill to obtain his inheritance – the city of Keidan – from his cousin Janusz. To some extent it also protected Keidan from suffering at the hands of Polish patriots.

The wars with Sweden and Russia ended in 1657. Boguslav brought the body of his cousin Janusz from Tykocin and placed it in the family crypt in Keidan's Calvinist church. He had a

[17] The mead brewed in Keidan by Jews was highly reputed throughout Lithuania and Poland.

metal plaque installed at the site with a long Latin inscription, detailing the conquests of Janusz, who represented the seventh generation of the Radziwill line, and giving his date of death.

After 1658, Poland and Lithuania began to recover slowly from the war's devastations, and Keidan's Jewish community began to get back on its feet. In 1658 the first apothecary shop was opened, where one can still see a licensing document signed by Boguslav Radziwill. In 1659 the first bridge across the Neviazhe River was built. Small houses were set up at both ends of the bridge for toll collectors. There was even an information office for new arrivals to Keidan.

In the little house on the city side of the bridge, where the market area began, lived the city servant, whose job was to see that the market and the streets were kept clean. He was also the town crier, who announced new orders from the ruler's castle or from the town hall. These announcements, preceded by the beating of a drum, were generally shouted out on Thursdays, the market days. Bridge tolls were collected by a Jew who leased the business. Boguslav confirmed all the rights granted to Jews by the earlier Radziwills.

Boguslav himself spent most of his time in Koenigsburg, Prussia, returning to Keidan only from time to time. Jews were appointed to handle the town's finances. Most of Boguslav's official documents were issued from Koenigsburg. This included a document authorizing Keidan's mayor, Oborsky, to provide the monks of the Russian Orthodox cloister with an annual 5 tons of rye, 4 tons of malt, 7½ tons of oats, 1 ton of buckwheat, 1 ton of barley, 1 ton of peas, 3 barrels of butter, 90 cheeses, and so forth. This was signed on September 12, 1661, in Koenigsburg.

On June 11, 1662 Mayor Oborsky reported to Duke Radziwill in Koenigsburg that, in defiance of the rights that had been previously granted to Jews, the Catholic bishop had posted notices in the market place and other public areas denying Jews the right to employ Christian servants.

On October 5, 1665, Boguslav Radziwill signed a contract, which turned over management of the castle and court in Keidan and a major part of the town's financial affairs to one Reb Wolf Isakovich. Reb Wolf had the authority to pass judgments and punishments on the residents of Keidan, just as if he were the ruler Radziwill. Reb Wolf contributed a great deal to the betterment and growth of the Jewish community in Keidan. With improvements in the welfare of Keidan's Jews, the town grew as a center of Torah, learning and piety. The greatest scholars of the time occupied the chief rabbinical posts in Keidan; its *yeshiva* as well as its *Talmud Torah* and *cheders* were famous throughout Zamut.

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After the peace with Russia in 1667, when Malorossiya[18] was turned over to the Russians, many Jews from that region, who had survived Khmelnytsky's pogroms, fled to Lithuania. Some came to Keidan. Although Radziwill lived in Koenigsburg, Keidan remained the focal point of Calvinism in Lithuania and a center of religious freedom. Thus the Jewish community was able to peacefully develop both economically and spiritually. Boguslav Radziwill died in 1669 and was laid to rest in the family vault of the Brandenburg princes in Koenigsburg.

X. FROM 1669 TO 1721

After Boguslav's death the Catholic church gradually grew in importance in Keidan. Documents from 1687 and 1697 record that the head monk of the Russian Orthodox church in Keidan won a lawsuit against the Bishop of Zamut, Dominik Tyszkiewicz[19], after Catholics attacked the church. At the same time, the German Lutherans began redecorating their

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[18] *Translator's note: An archaic term for the region roughly corresponding to contemporary Ukraine.*

[19] *Translator's note: Other sources name Casimir Pac as the bishop of Samogitia (Zamut) during that period.*

church, a brick edifice built in 1670 to replace an earlier wooden structure. As a result, the Catholic bishop ordered the church closed, confiscated the silver religious vessels and forbade worship there until he was paid a fine of 200 guilden for redecorating the interior without his permission.

In 1681 a huge conflagration destroyed most of the city, including the lyceum and the rich library that the Radziwills had built. It was the greatest catastrophe that Keidan had seen until then. The Jewish community also suffered greatly because of the fire, but their wealth was not diminished significantly. Keidan continued to be an important Jewish center in Lithuania and a principal town of Zamut. But conditions for Jews in Poland were getting worse, because of persecutions from the nobility, from Christian guilds, the Jesuits and students. Blood libel cases[20] arose in most countries of Europe where the Jesuits had influence. However, in Keidan Jews lived peacefully among the various Christian populations, because they all were united against a common enemy – the Jesuits.

In 1686 one Stefan Bolshetas complained to Radziwill's court manager that Jews did not observe the order to close businesses on Sundays, that they had spread out beyond the designated Jewish quarter into the wider city, and that Jews were becoming more powerful, richer and more numerous, in violation of the restrictions put on them.

In 1691 a Calvinist synod was held in Keidan, attended by Calvinists from various European countries. Because of the great persecutions suffered by Jews throughout Europe, in 1698 Rabbi Yosl Kobriner – an important scholar in Keidan – composed a penitential prayer, which was adopted by all the Jewish communities of Lithuania and Zamut.

The beginning of the eighteenth century saw the outbreak of major wars between Tsar Peter the Great of Russia and King Karl XII of Sweden. In 1704 Keidan was besieged by the Swedish general Lewenhaupt, and in December Karl XII actually spent several days in the city and attended a religious service in the Calvinist church. Keidan fared much worse in this conflict than it had during the earlier wars between Karl Gustav and Jan Casimir. As Russian and Swedish armies pursued each other through Keidan, the city was ruined. The famous Radziwill castle on the hill was burned and much of the city was destroyed. Both the Christian and Jewish populations suffered immensely. The Jewish community was so impoverished by the war that they could not cover their communal expenses; they had to borrow from the landowning nobility to pay their head-taxes and other fees to the government. Keidan belonged to the heirs of the Radziwills, whose trustee was the king of Prussia.

There exists a document characteristic for the times, dated July 30, 1707, in which the superintendent of Zamut, Shmuel Bitner, writes to the court council of the Prussian king about their abuse by noblemen to whom the Jews owed money. He writes that a certain nobleman, Gursky, who was owed several thousand guilden by the Jewish community in Keidan, had locked Jews into their synagogue, demanding payment, when they were inside praying on a Sabbath. Only with great effort were they able to arrange for the payment after Shabbat ended.

In 1710 a terrible plague wiped out much of the population of Lithuania and Zamut. Keidan suffered greatly. During the epidemic a certain German doctor, Kaneyn, who was also the postmaster of Keidan, was particularly active in providing medical aid to the community. Kaneyn died in the epidemic and on his tombstone, erected by his wife in the German cemetery, is inscribed: *"Die Pest brachte ihm die Todes-Post."* ["The plague brought him his death notice."]

In 1710 the first Catholic Carmelite cloister was erected, with a wooden church building that still stands in Cloister Lane.

Count Franciszek Czapski married Veronica Radziwill and obtained the city of Keidan as his dowry. Since the Czapskis were Catholics, the passing of Keidan into their hands strengthened the Catholic influence in the city considerably. The Jesuits, who had previously

[20] *Translator's note: False accusations against Jews involving the supposed ritual murder of Christians.*

had no power in Keidan, began to ascend. Nevertheless, the Jewish population continued to recover, and by 1721 Keidan was again among the most significant Jewish communities in Lithuania. That year, for instance, Jewish head-taxes in all of Lithuania totaled 60,000 guilden. The largest contributions came from these communities: Brisk (the largest Jewish community in Lithuania) – 5,150 guilden; Grodno – 4,500 guilden; Pinsk – 3,730 guilden; Vilna – 1,100 guilden; Minsk – 1,300 guilden; and Keidan – 4,300 guilden. In other words, Keidan was in third place, among the most important communities in Zamut and far surpassing Vilna and Minsk.

XI. FROM 1725 TO 1798

After the sad demise of the false messiah Shabbtai Zvi, many charlatans from his movement began hustling money in Poland, particularly in Podolia. Their shameful behavior aimed to deceive pious Talmudic Jews, using a false teaching of the *Zohar* to attract more followers to their doctrine. They strove to undermine the Talmud, the life force of Judaism in Poland, and to replace it with the *Zohar* and the mystical Kabbalah.

The movement's leaders sent a missionary, Moshe Meir Kamenker, from Moravia. He visited many Jewish communities in Poland, collecting funds and spreading the belief that the followers of Shabbtai Zvi, and not the adherents of the Talmud, were the truly faithful Jews. This was all done in secret. Some other missionaries were Yeshaiya Chasid and Leybele Prosnitz. Eventually their identities and the harm they were doing were discovered, and in 1725 they were excommunicated by Rabbi Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen, chief rabbi of the three communities of Altona, Wandsbek and Hamburg. This venerable rabbi and his chief aide, Rabbi Moshe Khoges, protected talmudic Judaism from the spread of Shabbtai Zvi's kabbalistic movement.

At that time the chief rabbi of the Keidan area was Rabbi Dovid Katzenellenbogen. In Brisk, one of the most important cities in Lithuania, the chief rabbi was Abraham Katzenellenbogen, the Keidan rabbi's son. The three generations of Katzenellenbogens stood watch against the dangers of Kabbalah, and made great efforts to enforce the precept of the elder, Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen, that "no one should study the *Zohar* before the age of 40."

In 1727 the rabbi of Brisk, Abraham Katzenellenbogen, came to Vilna to visit his wealthy father-in-law, Reb Yosele Elias Etkes. In those days Vilna was enthralled with a wonder-child who was the son of a great scholar, the Vilna rabbi Shlomo Zalman. When Abraham probed the six-year-old genius' knowledge of the bible and the *Gemara*, he was overwhelmed by the child's insight. He suggested to Shlomo Zalman that the boy should accompany him to Keidan to study with Abraham's father, Rabbi Dovid Katzenellenbogen. Shlomo Zalman, who at that time was in difficult financial straits, willingly agreed to the arrangement.

In Keidan the youth so impressed his teacher that Dovid Katzenellenbogen then devoted all his energies to his young pupil. The boy's name was Eliyahu, and when he grew up he was known as the famous Vilna *Gaon*, or *HaGr'a*[21]. Dovid Katzenellenbogen's influence on his pupil, particularly regarding the teaching of Kabbalah, later became evident in the *Gaon's* dealings with Zalman Schneurson and the followers of hasidism. Eliyahu married the daughter of a prosperous Keidaner, Reb Yehuda. The *Gaon* said of his wife Chana that her acts of charity and compassion were as innumerable as the stars in the heavens. After Chana's death, the *Gaon* had inscribed on her tombstone in Hebrew:

> Here lies Chana
> She died on 5 Kislev 5543 [11 November, 1782]
> None could take her place,
> There is no way to sing her praises.

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[21] *Translator's note:* Gaon = *genius.* HaGr'a = *Hebrew abbreviation for* HaGaon Rabbi Eliyahu

Among the Vilna *Gaon's* seven famous students, one was from Keidan. This was his brother-in-law Zalman, who left his home in Keidan to study with him in Vilna. The Vilna *Gaon* died on 19 Tishrei 5558 [9 October, 1797]. His death left the Jews of Keidan feeling orphaned, along with those of Vilna, because of his spiritual as well as physical connection to both communities. Keidan and Vilna remained fortresses of opposition[22] and no hasids gained entrance to those cities.[23]

XII. FROM 1784 TO 1812

The Radziwills were somewhat closer to Germany than to Poland, because of their relationship to the prince of Brandenburg. Hence trade with Germany was always very important in Keidan, especially for Jewish merchants. As the Hanseatic League – the union of German port cities – blossomed, the Neviazhe River and its sailing vessels became wedded to Koenigsburg, Danzig and even Hamburg. Prosperity for Jewish merchants benefited Jewish craftsmen as well, and Keidan became the wealthiest community in Zamut.

Day-to-day Jewish life was basically the same in Keidan as in other Jewish communities in Lithuania. The members of the *kahal* [community council] played the leading role. As the saying went, Torah made the best merchandise. The head of the rabbinical court in Keidan was always a person of the greatest eminence. The *yeshivas* and *cheders* were constantly full of students, and men studied religious texts together day and night. The air was thick with Torah and piety.

The *kahal* governed the living and the *khevra kadisha* [burial society] oversaw the dead in Keidan and its surrounding settlements.[24] Precise pictures of daily life can be seen in the record books kept by the *kahal*, the burial society and the tradesmen's guilds.

The burial society held its annual banquet on the 22nd day of the Hebrew month Kislev. According to its journal, on that date in 1682, [24 December], the society's expenditures included: "4 chickens – 28 *groshen*; 4 geese – 20 *groshen*; a wagonload of wood – 10 *groshen*; 1 turkey – 35 *groshen*; 10 eggs – 4 *groshen*; 4 smaller chickens – 12 *groshen*; 1 barrel of beer – 6 *groshen*."

We read further that a Jew who lacked sufficient funds to pay the burial fee instead gave a pledge – a prayer book printed in Amsterdam plus five *groshen* in cash. It was an honor to become a member of the *khevra kadisha*, and only members were admitted to the banquet. A new member was expected to give a banquet for the senior members of the society and to contribute a few guilden.

The Talmud society was the most prestigious group in town. Its celebration, held to mark the end of a study cycle, dominated the town's social calendar. Other groups, large and small, also held regular banquets. Keidaners loved to embellish such affairs with pantomimes or performances, which might include a "robber dance," "quarrel dance," or biblical dramas like the "Binding of Isaac" or the "Selling of Joseph."

The *kahal* was responsible for collecting the head tax that every Jew had to pay to the government, as well as funds for Jewish communal needs. Since Keidan was a regional center, the council was kept very busy.

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[22] *Translator's note: Opponents of hasidism were known as* mitnagdim*, or* misnagdim *in Ashkenazic Hebrew and Yiddish.*

[23] It was not until many years later that the "*Sheva Kruim*" ["Seven Called Up"] synagogue was founded where Keidan Jews who leaned toward the *Chabad* school of hasidism prayed – not, God forbid, in the Sephardic style – but differently from other synagogues in that they began Torah processions on *Shmini Atseret* instead of *Simchat Torah*.

[24] The gravediggers' chapel, in the main synagogue yard, was the only one in town with a small fenced-in garden next to it, with a pair of cherry trees inside.

The "Register of the Land of Lithuania" describes a regulation issued by the Jewish council of Slutzk on 6 Tamuz, 5551 [July 8, 1791], assigning all settlements on the right side of the Neman river to the Keidan district, including Slobodka, which is near Kovno. This was for all religious and legal affairs, and did not apply to government head-taxes, which Slobodka, like Kovno, would continue to pay through the Grodno *kahal*.

In 1792 the king of Poland, Stanislaw August, declared Keidan a crown city with special privileges for its citizens, including greater independence from the nobility. The city was also given a new coat of arms: eagle wings on a background of gold and blue stripes, with an eagle's claw grasping a horseshoe with three red crosses below, and flying angels with wings and a laurel wreath above. This was Poland's last gift to Keidan.

The political situation in Poland deteriorated, so that the Catholics, whose power had gradually become entrenched in Keidan, could not devote themselves fully to persecuting Jews, because Poland itself had become terminally ill. In 1772 the first partition[25] occurred, followed by the second, and finally by the third in 1795, which gave Lithuania and Zamut to Russia.

At first, Keidan felt almost no changes stemming from the partition. Not only did the local Russian population not increase, but indeed in 1797 the Russian Orthodox monastery was forced to close for lack of support.

Some time after 1784, the Keidan Jewish community decided to build a large brick synagogue and a new house of study.[26] The exterior architecture of the synagogue was quite plain. The women's section was on the second story over the anteroom, with a high wall and artistically grated windows facing east.

When the synagogue was completed, the best craftsmen were hired to carve the Torah's ark and to decorate the vault and ceiling. The ark, which occupied almost a third of the eastern wall, reached from floor to ceiling and was covered with artfully assembled carvings of flowers, animals and birds, painted and gilded. It also contained a perpetual calendar. On one of the ark's carved columns, under glass, was a parchment with the name of the community leader who had been instrumental in building the synagogue and study house – Abraham Abli, son of the teacher and rabbi Yehoshua, of the family Rom – and the year the work was completed, 1807.[27]

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[25] *Translator's note: The territory of Poland-Lithuania was divided up among the empires of Russia, Prussia and Austria.*

[26] *Translator's note: The study house* ("bes medresh" *in Yiddish or* "beit hamidrash" *in modern Hebrew) also served as a community prayer space, particularly in winter when the Great Synagogue (also known as the "cold shul" because it lacked heating) was idle.*

[27] The inscription on the parchment in the holy ark [written in Hebrew rhymed prose]: "In those days when the 14th [rabbi] sat in our synagogue, along with our elders and scholars, we beheld the beauty and glory of the sanctuary and study house built in our encampment, and we responded joyfully, saying, let us thank and praise God, the foundation of foundations, the force behind all works, who makes happy beginnings and successful endings; and the spirit began to surge and moved the people to praise the Lord, and the work was accepted and approved. And there was one young man of high qualities and great virtues, acting with wisdom, insight and responsibility, diligent in his labor, a capable leader, who wished to perform a service for many generations. After he had studied the art of building thoroughly he became an architect, and he laid out the pleasant halls and sanctuaries for men and women, the holy arks for the Torah, the processional aisles and the splendid windows. His strong hand was guided by his faith and sense of propriety towards all involved, and the work was done expeditiously. He oversaw the work, year after year, with his heart for his beloved God, for the glory of his people and the wonderful Torah. With his own money he completed the splendid holy ark and its magnificent ornaments which he arranged properly, and he produced a great work of art, for which he will be constantly praised, and he has earned a good name which will be remembered for many generations. He will be remembered for his scrupulous honesty, unselfishness and integrity. He is one of our own, a leader in our community, embraced by all and man guided by generosity and good will.

There was a large sundial with Hebrew letters over the stone gate leading to the synagogue courtyard, where weddings were held from that time on. To the right of the anteroom was the council room, where the council and community leaders conducted public affairs. There was also a jail, for the confinement of lawbreakers whom the council had ordered punished.

In that same year of 1807, there was a cholera outbreak so severe that in just a few months, the Keidan Jewish community alone recorded 397 deaths, according to burial society records. Christians perished as well.

Russia gradually began to introduce some typically Russian "reforms" for the Jews of Lithuania. The first major blow came in 1804, when Tsar Alexander I ordered Jews expelled from rural villages. This brought to Keidan a large number of impoverished Jews, who had been displaced and left with no way to support themselves. There was a large increase in the number of tavern-keepers and small shop owners, but mainly this led to a larger number of gardeners and orchard-keepers, who in summer would rent small plots near Keidan, usually in the Januszova villages, and plant vegetables, or rent orchards. The local produce, especially the turnips, had a reputation throughout Zamut and was sold not only in Keidan, but throughout the region.

XIII. FROM 1812 TO 1825

Napoleon's war with Russia in 1812 was a great misfortune for Keidan. Having the French and Russian armies march through repeatedly did the city no good. When the French occupied Keidan they turned the Calvinist church into a horse stable. Like most Lithuanian Jews, Keidaners supported the Russians and rejoiced in Napoleon's defeat, particularly because the Catholic Poles and their religious leaders strongly backed the French. The Poles thus grew furious with the Jews.

After the war life returned to normal. The great struggle that raged elsewhere in Lithuania between *hasidim* and *mitnagdim* did not seem to affect Keidan. Its Jewish community was very observant, and its religious leaders saw to it that no innovations were introduced. If there was any hint of heresy, or even an echo of Moses Mendelssohn's[28] philosophy, every effort was made to sweep it away.

The record-book of a craftsmen's guild provides an interesting picture of life in the Keidan Jewish community in those days: On the first day of Rosh Hashana, a tailor appeared in the synagogue wearing a velvet *yarmulke*. This greatly disturbed the propertied gentlemen seated along the eastern wall,[29] who possessed the exclusive right to wear such headgear. Immediately after the holiday the tailor was summoned to the *kahal* office, where he was fined ten pounds of candles and ordered to hand over his *yarmulke*.

This punishment deeply offended all of Keidan's tradesmen, who had been united in their guilds for ages. So on the first day of Sukkot, not only tailors but also shoemakers, furriers and others came to services wearing new velvet *yarmulkes*, great fur hats and long satin coats with belts – just like the gentry along the eastern wall, and even finer. On the second day of Sukkot they repeated this, just to spite Keidan's eastern-wall big shots.

This, however, cost the rebellious Keidan tradesmen dearly. The very next day, Count Czapski's guards hauled them all to the central warehouse and whipped each one. Such a

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"He is the wise and good man, the son of our teacher and rabbi, Reb Yehoshua, of the family Rom. May God remember him for his good deed, his generosity and his work for the sanctified new study house and synagogue. May God bless his house and cause it to be fruitful and multiply. May He be generous to His people Israel and return many thousands to their land. The work was finished in the "year of our happiness" [a Hebrew acronym for 5567, or 1807], which we constantly praise."

[28] *Translator's note: Moses Mendelssohn, 1729-86, Berlin philosopher who began the movement for the secular enlightenment of Jews, called* haskala.

[29] *Translator's note: The eastern wall is the area of the synagogue reserved for those of wealth or high status.*

shameful thing had never happened before in Keidan's Jewish community. The Radziwills had treated all Keidan Jews equally, as free citizens. As enlightened Calvinists, the rulers never inflicted corporal punishment. For example, a Jew once got into a spat with a head of the burial society, insulted that he wasn't let into the society's banquet. When the Jew took revenge by informing the Radziwills that the society head had given the Duke the finger as he rode through the city, Radziwill ordered the official and his family expelled from Keidan.[30] But never was he whipped.

As free and equal citizens of Keidan, accustomed to enjoying more privileges than other Jews in Lithuania and Poland, the tradesmen were thus very bitter at the abuse they had suffered at the hands of their wealthier brothers. This united them in a holy war against the *kahal*.

The battle was waged in the judicial offices of the Russian government, which under Alexander I was not hostile toward Jews, and was inclined to listen to complaints from ordinary folk who felt oppressed by local big shots. However, the Jewish community leaders of Keidan had the means to grease the government councilors' palms, and the power of the bribe proved greater than all the tradesmen's efforts. The battle dragged on for years, costing the *kahal* as well as the artisans' guilds thousands of rubles.

One day, news came that the emperor's brother, Konstantin Pavlovich, military commander of Poland and Lithuania, would shortly be passing through Keidan. The artisans decided to hand Konstantin a petition, complaining about the judicial council's failure to punish the *kahal* leaders for their insult. However, they failed to keep their plans secret. Minutes before Konstantin's arrival, the artisan who was standing in the petitioners' line with the document in hand got into a fight with one of his workmen, and the police arrested them both for disturbing the peace. Konstantin passed by without seeing the petition, and the city fathers, who had paid off the treacherous workman for that purpose, prevailed again.

The tradesmen then decided to take justice into their own hands. If they caught a member of the offending town council in the Borer Woods or elsewhere outside of town they would, as they say, beat him black and blue. Eventually, the *kahal* decided to make peace with the artisans and sent an assistant to begin negotiations.

The artisans presented the following conditions: First, the *yarmulke* and belted robe should be admissible garb for all Jews, tradesmen as well as property owners. Secondly, at every dispute in the rabbinical court between a tradesman and property owner, there had to be one judge from the tradesmen's side. A leader of the artisans also had to represent them inside the *kahal's* chambers, so they could be sure of obtaining impartial rulings. The *kahal* agreed to these conditions, and thus peace was concluded between the synagogue's eastern and western walls.

After their long struggle the artisans founded their own synagogue, the *Chayei Adam*,[31] where they had their own eastern wall and their own associate rabbi. He was obligated to come and pray in the synagogue three times daily, and to study the *Chayei Adam* with the artisans between afternoon and evening prayers. Fridays after supper and Saturdays after afternoon prayers he was to teach the weekly Torah portion. To pay the rabbi's salary, each elementary-school pupil was obliged to pay 18 *kopecks* over three years. Of this, 12 *kopecks* went to the community and six to the rabbi.

From then on the equal rights of tradesmen in Keidan were never again violated. Moreover, at various times important scholars and pietists emerged among the tradesmen of Keidan.[32]

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[30] As recorded in the journal of the Keidan burial society.

[31] *Translator's note:* "Chayei Adam" (*"The Life of Man") is a book on Jewish law, written for laymen rather than rabbinic scholars.*

[32] There is a story of an artisan who was so pious that in a year when *etrogs* [citrons used in the *Sukkot* holiday ceremony] were extremely expensive, he sold his house and used the money to purchase an etrog.

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A couple of decades after these events, the richest tailor in Keidan, Eliyahu Vilner, had a small prayer-house built, not far from the *Chayei Adam* synagogue. Artisans and butchers prayed here as well, and studied the book called *Ein Yakov.* [33]

This same Eliyahu Vilner, a childless man who was very influential in the community, once purchased the right of opening the ark of the Torah for the closing prayer of Yom Kippur at the Great Synagogue where the city elders prayed. Thereafter, for the remainder of his life, he would go from his prayer house to the Great Synagogue every year to open the ark for the closing prayer at Yom Kippur. He and his wife both lived to advanced ages.

In the 1820's there lived in Keidan a man named Aryeh Leib (Leon) Mandelshtam, who had married a local girl. By the pious standards of the city he was considered a freethinker, and because of this was unable to sustain himself there for long. In 1844 he became the first Russian Jew to obtain a degree in philology from St. Petersburg University. Eventually the minister of education, Uvarov, appointed him to administer the government plan to spread education among Russia's Jews.

XIV. FROM 1824 TO 1856

After the failure of the 1825 Decembrist revolt against Tsar Nicholas I in Russia, the revolutionary movement in Poland and Lithuania grew stronger, until an eruption occurred in 1831. Since Keidan was the residence of Count Czapski, who was very active in the Polish uprising, large groups of patriotic Polish confederates gathered in the city. Russian troops, sent to suppress the revolt, besieged Keidan from across the river, by the Kovno road. A heavy artillery battle ensued between the retreating Poles and the pursuing Russians.

This all took place one Shabbat eve in summer, when the synagogue was filled with people at prayer. A Russian cannonball penetrated the eastern wall right above the Torah ark and, wondrously, passed over the worshippers' heads, through open doors into the anteroom and outside, without injuring anyone. This was seen as a miracle. To this day the hole in the eastern wall has remained unpatched, to mark it for future generations. And a large iron cannonball is embedded high in a wall by the market place where the shell came to rest, as a reminder of the battle.

After the Russians captured Keidan during this uprising, two frightened Jews hid in an attic. Being curious to see what was happening outside, they peeked out of small window and were observed by the Russians, who took them for spies and shot them. After the revolt was put down, the Russians placed a garrison of soldiers in Keidan. They were quartered in the Catholic monastery in 1832, and since that time it has remained a barracks. The government allowed the wooden chapel to remain as a church.

Even with the increase in the Russian population around Keidan, as well as the growth of the German Lutheran community, Polish-Catholic culture did not diminish. There was a five-class gymnasium, where all subjects were taught in Polish. Highly reputed throughout Lithuania, it had one of the finest libraries, with over 15,000 volumes and a well-equipped physics laboratory. Count Czapski built a splendid castle, a park and bridges over the Datnovke [Dotnuvėlė] and Smilga rivers.

The Jewish community in Keidan suffered the same miseries under the tyrannical rule of Nicholas I as did Jews elsewhere. That story begins with the turmoil of enforced military conscriptions and the kidnapping of children to fill the yearly military quotas imposed on the Keidan *kahal.* The council rooms near the synagogue overflow with the tears of unfortunate mothers and disheartened fathers. The community elders flail about, acting bizarrely, as

[33] *Translator's note:* Ein Yakov *is a book of Talmudic morality tales.*

elsewhere. They hire snatchers,[34] they buy exemptions for the sons of the rich, and the masses of the poor are offered up for sacrifice like chickens.

The *haskala* movement began to penetrate Keidan – this fortress of Torah and piety – and managed to attract some youths, to the great despair of their parents. In 1843 an impoverished cooper named Reb Hirshe Bender, who was also a great scholar and a remarkable optimist, had a son who was named Moshe Leib. The father began tutoring his only son at a very early age. Then the boy's grandfather, who was a scholar and very knowledgeable in the bible, took over his education. The boy showed signs of being a genius.

His father led a group studying the *Ein Yakov* in Eliyahu Vilner's little synagogue, and young Moshe Leib, while still a child, led a similar group for youngsters. This boy grew up to be the famous *maskil* [enlightener] and Lover of Zion who was later well known as the Zionist leader and Hebrew author, Moshe Leib Lilienblum[35].

In 1846 Pesach Smilg had a son who became an important Jewish scholar, Dr. Yosef Smilg. Thus Keidan made important advances into the expanding Jewish world and the growing *haskala* movement, along with the many other communities of Russian Jewry.

After Alexander II was crowned Tsar of Russia in 1855, he abolished the practice of kidnapping small children and training them as "cantonists" or future soldiers. Keidan, along with many other Russian Jewish communities, breathed easier.

XV. FROM 1850 TO 1880

Count Marian Czapski, whose grandparents were Franciszek-Stanislaw Czapski and Veronica Radziwill, was a chamberlain of the royal court and provincial marshal, and the most educated member of the Czapski family. He graduated from the faculty of science and philosophy of the University of Berlin. Being very wealthy, and having studied painting and sculpture as a young man, he assembled a large gallery of paintings, a fine numismatic collection and, in particular, one of the most important libraries. He decorated his castle in Keidan very artistically and beautified the surrounding park.

In 1852 he became the trustee of the Keidan *gymnasium*, and under his supervision the school became one of the best in Lithuania. After his marriage he received as dowry a large estate in Miropol (Myropil), in the province of Volhynia, where he spent some of his time. His friendly relationship with the Keidan Jewish community was demonstrated when he donated bricks to build the new house of study.

In appreciation of his generosity, the community inscribed his name on a stone memorial plaque in the building. In September, 1857, when the study house was dedicated, a silver chalice was presented to Czapski, and the community leader Shlomo Berenstein delivered a proclamation of thanks, written in Hebrew, German and French. The Hebrew version was arranged in an acrostic, spelling out the name "M A R I A N Czapski." The date was Elul, 5617 – September, 1857, the dedication date of the study house.

The government intensified its policy of russification in Lithuania, and in 1859 ordered all classes in the Keidan gymnasium to be taught in Russian. The majority of the students were patriotic Poles, who were unwilling to study in a school where the first language was not Polish, and in a short time the number of students fell from 500 to 141.

In 1863 the second Polish revolt broke out. Almost all the former students of the gymnasium took part. The Jews of Keidan, like most Lithuanian Jews, avoided taking part in this revolt,

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[34] *Translators' note: Kidnappers (*khapers *in Yiddish) were often hired by Jewish communal elders to abduct young boys for the Russian draft.*

[35] *Translators' note: Moshe Leib Lilienblum, 1843-1910, was an influential writer and one of the founders of the Lovers of Zion (*Hovevei Tsion*) movement, early advocates of the return to Palestine.*

even more than in the first. As a result, they were spared the bloody repressions that Muravyov, the governor-general of Vilna, was imposing throughout Lithuania.

In 1864 the Keidan gymnasium was shut down completely by the government, and the building was converted to a barracks to house the local military garrison. The large library was divided up between the city library of Vilna and the gymnasium in Kovno. The physics laboratory with all its equipment was given to Vilna's technical high school *[real-gymnasium].* In place of the large Polish gymnasium, the government opened a Russian elementary school, which never grew beyond its initial three classes. Thus, Polish language and culture, which had dominated Keidan for more than two hundred years, finally came to an end there.

Count Marian Czapski, who was heavily involved in the revolt, was exiled to Siberia, and his castle and grounds were confiscated by the Russian government in 1866. The rich library, which included many French, Latin and Polish books, was shipped off to the public library in St. Petersburg. Thus were the Czapski and Radziwill families robbed of an inheritance accumulated over 250 years.

The Miropol estate of Czapski's wife was not confiscated, however. And after several years, Czapski was allowed to return from exile. He settled with his daughter in Posen (Poznan), where he spent his last years engaged in literary activities. He died in 1875.

Keidan was thus freed from Polish influence, and also from the subservient status in which one could be dragged off to the lord's manor and whipped for the slightest infractions or at the whim of the lord. Eventually, the castle and grounds were purchased from the government by Count Totleben. In the autumn of 1868, two horse-artillery batteries, the fifth and sixth, were quartered in Keidan. This provided a welcome source of income for the local merchants and artisans.

Soon after, the Libau-Romny railway line came into existence. Because of Count Totleben's influence, the train station for Keidan was built across from the castle courtyard. The train connected Keidan with the inner regions of Russia and increased trade. It also provided work for Keidan's tradesmen and employment for many contractors, shopkeepers and merchants.

The economic conditions of Jews in Keidan improved. Children of wealthier families began to be educated under the influence of the *haskala*. An interesting folksong, popular in the 1860's, described the then-new ladies' fashion of wearing crinolines:

> Once, when you'd enter a well-to-do household,
> it would be as dark and slippery as a deep hole;
> and on the shelf would be displayed copper and tin.
> But now you only see the crinoline.

In 1874 a new system of general military conscription was started, which ended the Jewish community council's practice of providing soldiers to the government. In the same year Kovno was made a provincial capital, and Keidan was reassigned from the jurisdiction of Vilna to Kovno.

At the end of the 1870's the chief rabbi of Keidan, Abraham Shimon Troib, died. He was the last of a series of great scholars to occupy that position.

* * *

Count Totleben first distinguished himself as a young engineering officer at the battle of Sevastopol in 1854. But he achieved the highest distinction in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. Returning victorious from that war, he decided to beautify and expand his castle in Keidan. He erected a Turkish mosque with a minaret. The walls of the mosque were inscribed in Arabic with quotations from the Quran. A whole Bulgarian village was created. The park was adorned with beautiful tree-lined lanes, marble statues of mythological figures, bowers and summer houses with fountains, and with the castle was considered among the most beautiful of its kind in Lithuania. He also built water mills near his estate at Vilain (Vilainiai), which were leased to Jews.

The court became Totleben's summer residence, even when he was named governor-general of the Vilna district. The Totleben family was very amiable toward the Jews of Keidan, and a number of Jewish merchants, shopkeepers and artisans were befriended at court. In summer, high officials from St. Petersburg would visit the court, providing income for Keidan. Every fall after the harvest, Keidan was enlivened with a people's holiday in the park. There were illuminations, fireworks, music and dancing and gifts for the workers, and the whole city celebrated.

XVI. FROM 1881 TO 1914

Alexander II was assassinated in March, 1881, and with Alexander III's assumption of power, terrible pogroms against Jews began throughout Russia. However, in Lithuania, where Count Totleben was governor general, no pogroms occurred. At times special units of Cossacks were sent in to make sure that nobody even looked cockeyed at the Jews. And so Keidaner Jews lived securely under the protection of Count Totleben.

For generations, property owners in Keidan had paid fees for the land on which their houses stood, first to the Radziwills and later to the Czapskis, since the entire city belonged to them. But when the court was confiscated by the Russian government after the Polish revolt, the residents sued to cancel their land fees, claiming special privileges awarded them by the Polish kings, particularly Stanislaw August when Keidan was made a crown city. The lawsuit stretched on for years and was finally settled on September 25, 1886, when the Kovno district court ruled that property owners in Keidan owned the land on which their houses stood, and no longer had to pay special fees for it.

Much of the land in Keidan still belonged to the Calvinist community, by then so diminished that there was nobody in the church on Sunday. Once a year a Calvinist preacher came from Vilna and gathered enough worshipers from around the region to hold a service. The central part of the city around the church was built up with homes and stores, mostly rented by Jews from the Calvinists.

After the city ceased to function as an autonomous municipality, with the transfer from Poland to Russia, the city hall was rented out as a tavern. In the 1870s and 80s, the bar's Jewish owner was called "*Podratushe*," which means "under the town hall." Until the end of the 1880's one of the rooms in the town hall served as a chapel, called "the soldiers' *minyan*,"[36] that was mostly used by former soldiers.

* * *

Before the 1880's few Jews left Keidan, except to go to Eretz Israel, and these were mainly elderly religious people who wished to die in the Holy Land. But after Alexander III took the throne, as pogroms began to spread throughout Russia, and Jews were expelled from Moscow and other Russian cities, a heavy emigration to America began. Later many Jews also left for England and South Africa, but most went to America.

Keidan was also stricken with emigration fever, especially after Count Totleben's death, as gradually the heavy hand of Alexander III's regime began to be felt. The first to leave were mostly from the poor and working classes. Typically, a young man left to escape military service, and as he earned money and worked his way up in America he sent for his parents and eventually for other relatives as well. At first the wealthy were ashamed to admit that someone from their family had gone to America. Young people from prosperous families generally went to big cities, to study or to seek their fortunes, but eventually even they started emigrating, some to America, some to South Africa. As they sent money home, the shame of emigrating dissolved even among the wealthy.

At the end of the 1880's a large section of Smilga Street and its neighboring alleys were consumed by fire. This led to the organization of a volunteer firefighters' brigade. The first

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[36] *Translator's note: A* minyan *is the quorum of ten male adults required for formal prayer services.*

infirmary (*selskaya letchebnitsa* in Russian, or village clinic) was established in 1888 in rented quarters. Later Count Totleben's widow erected a special infirmary building, named for her husband, on the courtyard road near the Smilga.

In the early 1880's the Keidan *talmud torah* [Hebrew elementary school], which had been long neglected, was converted into a more modern school, where in addition to Jewish subjects one studied Russian and other topics, the same as in the existing Russian elementary school. In 1892, the Lutheran community also founded an elementary school near the German church. In the same year, the first bank opened in Keidan. It was a branch of the Vilna commercial bank. In a short time the volume of transactions in the bank exceeded one million rubles annually.

A prominent leader in the Lovers of Zion movement as well as other Zionist, national and cultural activities in the Keidan community was Yosef Blumson (Yoseh Bereh Fachters) who dedicated his life to these educational causes. Just as they had participated in the *haskala* movement, Keidaners also became deeply involved in the Lovers of Zion movement, particularly since its main pillar had been Keidaner Moshe Leib Lilienblum.

And when political Zionism began in 1897[37], many young people in Keidan were drawn in, devoting themselves fully to the movement. Battles were fought against Zionism's opponents, first with the orthodox and later with the revolutionaries, led by the Bund.[38] The Bund also had supporters in Keidan, and there were many debates and even fistfights between Bundists and members of the Zionist Workers Party [*Poalei Tsion].*

In the beginning of 1898 S.M. Ginzburg and P.S. Marek of St. Petersburg published announcements in the journals *"HaMelitz," "Voskhod"* and *"HaTzefira,"*[39] inviting Jewish intellectuals in Russia with close ties to the Jewish masses to collect and record Jewish folk songs. There was a response from towns and cities, resulting in the first collection of real Jewish folk songs in Russia, published in 1901 in St. Petersburg under the editorship of Ginzburg and Marek.[40] A total of 376 folk songs were included in the book, of which 154 were collected in and around Keidan by the author of this article and his friend, Dr. Aharon Leib Pick. Through an oversight, the songs that appear above the names Cassel and Pick are described as having been collected in Kovno province. In reality, they were collected in Keidan. These songs were among the best and most interesting in the collection.

The Jewish population in Keidan lived and functioned as a part of Russian Jewry, not very differently than in other cities and towns in Russia. Yet in some ways Keidan was somewhat different from other Jewish communities. The Totleben family – the widow of the count, the new young count and the sons-in-law – were highly placed, with major influence in Russian government circles. Their friendly attitude toward Jews was, unintentionally, very beneficial for the Jewish community of Keidan.

Remarkably, even after the death of Alexander III and the bloody coronation of Nicholas II, when Jewish life and blood became worthless throughout Russia, life for Jews in Keidan was not seriously affected. Several Keidaners died as soldiers at the front during the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. The 1905 revolution, which was put down with bloodbaths throughout Russia, passed over Keidan without consequence. When the systematic persecution of revolutionaries and ordinary Jews by Nicholas II's rampaging regime took place everywhere in Russia, again Keidan was not affected.

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[37] *Translator's note: The first Zionist Congress, convened in 1897 by Theodore Herzl in Basel, Switzerland, formally called for the establishment of a Jewish state.*

[38] *Translator's note: The Jewish Labor Bund was a socialist party, founded in Vilna in 1897 and active in eastern Europe until World War II.*

[39] *Translator's note: The Hebrew-language weeklies* "HaMelitz" *(The Interpreter) and* "HaTzefira" *(The Dawn) published in St. Petersburg and Warsaw respectively, and the Russian-language weekly* "Voskhod" *(Sunrise) of St. Petersburg all promoted enlightenment, Zionism and Jewish nationalism.*

[40] "*Evreiskiye Narodniye Pesni v Rossii*" (Jewish Folk Songs in Russia), published 1901 in St. Petersburg, [reissued 1991 in photocopy by Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, Israel.]

It is noteworthy that [Pyotr Arkadyevich] Stolypin, the notorious "black prime minister" and right hand of Nicholas II, had his estate in the vicinity of Keidan. He was the leader of the nobility in the Kovno district, and had been chairman of the military draft committee in Keidan before he became prime minister. He came to Keidan often and was known to do favors for many of the local Jews who knew and traded with him. As prime minister, Stolypin was the nemesis of the Jews. Yet on his visits to Keidan he remained their old, familiar, joking friend.

In 1897 the government assumed a monopoly on the liquor trade, closing down the saloons, all but one of which were owned by Jews. Many formerly prosperous Jews were thus left without a livelihood.

* * *

What [Jewish historian Simon] Dubnov called the Russian government's thirty-year war against the Jews lasted from 1881 until 1911, the year Stolypin was assassinated in Kiev. Keidaner Jews were not greatly affected, as long as they stayed in Keidan. Nevertheless, life was getting harder, due to the restrictions on trade and especially on youth education. This prompted more and more young people to leave their hometown. The promenade walk – the old bridge over the Neviazhe River which had long served as a rendezvous for young people and was packed with strollers on evenings, Sabbaths and holidays – grew ever more empty as young people left.

The Jewish community diminished, and it was difficult to earn a living. Many Jewish residents existed on what their children or relatives sent from abroad or from Russia's large cities. A raging antisemitism burned in Poland and Russia, fed by the chauvinistic Polish nationalist movement on one side and the black Russian monarchists on the other. This drove many Jews to support the Lithuanian nationalists.

The Lithuanians, who were culturally oppressed by both the Russians and the Polish Catholic church, expected support from their more cultured neighbors, the Jews. Meanwhile, the political skies in Europe were darkening as the year 1914 approached. In the spring of 1914, a significant portion of Keidan burned down, from the bridge to the beginning of Long Street and from the market square to the synagogue courtyard. The fire served as an omen of the coming world conflagration.

XVII. FROM 1914 TO 1930

The insanity of world war ignited Europe on August 1, 1914, after Austria declared war on Serbia. Immediately Poland and Lithuania became fields of slaughter. Everyone suffered terribly, but Jews became the real victims.

The war gave Polish antisemitism a new demonic purpose: taking revenge on the Jews. Both the Russians and Germans flattered the Poles to try to gain their alliance, and the Poles took advantage of this by falsely accusing Jews of spying against each side in turn. The Jews' troubles of those days is a story of its own.

During the first winter of the war in 1914-15, many Jews from surrounding towns fled into Keidan The community increased in size, though mainly with older people and women: Young men had been taken up by the war. Meanwhile, Germany achieved victory after victory, capturing Polish and Lithuanian cities one after another, and beating the Russian army right and left. The thoroughly corrupt Russian government attributed its failures, not to the ineptitude of its commanders and war ministers, but to the Jews' supposed espionage.

Nikolai Nikolaevich, head of the Russian armies on the eastern front and Tsar Nikolai's uncle, decided they could succeed against the Germans only if they removed all Jews from the region. So in March 1915 the Russians began transferring the Jews of Poland and Lithuania deeper into Russia.

In Keidan, as in Kovno, the order came on May 16: By midnight on May 18 all Jews – young and old, women and children, even the sick – had to leave town. Any Jew remaining after midnight would be hanged, the order said. The Jews were packed into freight cars at the train

station, men with women, the old and the sick, without mercy. The doors were sealed and the trains took off in various directions. People took only what they could carry to the station, two *verst* from the town. Everything else was left behind.

Thus the Keidan Jewish community dispersed, along with Jews who had fled earlier from other towns, in a reenactment of the 1495 expulsion under Grand Duke Alexander. Most of the Keidan Jews went to Vilna, while some went to Homel [Gomel], and others turned up in southern Russia. Many were dragged off deep into Russia, even to Siberia. Some never arrived, as they died en route.

The blow fell just as hard on the Keidan "aristocrats" as on other Lithuanian Jews; Nikolai Nikolaevich made no distinction. When they learned of the expulsion order, Christians in and around Keidan made plans to divide the Jews' property up among themselves. And right after the Jews had vacated their homes, leaving whatever goods they couldn't carry, Christians descended and took everything – furniture, bedding, clothes, anything that could be moved. Gradually they moved into the houses, taking over as the owners of Jewish property.

Despite Nikolai Nikolaevich's "brilliant" strategic planning, the Russians were forced to abandon Keidan, burning the wooden bridge over the Neviazhe behind them. The Germans, who later rebuilt the bridge, were able to enter Keidan without a fight. Later there was a half-hearted exchange of fire with the retreating Russians near the railroad bridge, which they had managed to half-destroy. The period of Russian rule in Keidan was over.

Later, when the Germans occupied Vilna, the Jews of Keidan who had gone there obtained permission from the German military authorities to return to Keidan. When they returned, the Germans helped them regain their homes that had been seized by Christians. The Germans also helped the Jews recover some of their household items found in Christian houses. Most of the goods, however, had disappeared.

These Jewish families who returned from Vilna formed the nucleus of a new Jewish community in Keidan. Gradually, more Jews came from other towns that had been destroyed in the war, and the Jewish community of Keidan resumed life under German occupation, as did other towns and cities of the region.

* * *

Peace brought with it the creation of a number of new nations, including Lithuania. After 500 years of domination by foreign powers and cultures, Lithuania and became, as if by magic, a free and independent nation, thanks to the Versailles peace treaty. In reality, it was only a small remnant of the great, rich, and powerful Lithuanian state that had existed until 1417, when the last heathen fire – the "*znitsh*" – had been extinguished. The new statelet was constructed out of several Russian provinces. And before the infant Lithuanian republic could even take its first steps, Poland had managed to snatch away its oldest and most important city – Vilna – and the surrounding region, diminishing Lithuania even further.

Without a culture of their own, almost without a literary language or literature, without political experience, without knowledge of self-government or politics, the Lithuanians flailed about erratically. At one moment they were friendly toward the Jews, expecting their support in building their new republic. Then in unexpected and chauvinistic mood swings, the Lithuanians would turn to persecuting and suppressing Jews.

The Lithuanians replaced their lost capital of Vilna with Kovno. Keidan became a district capital, the site of government offices. Count Totleben's castle was nationalized and turned into an agricultural college. A Lithuanian gymnasium and Hebrew and Yiddish high schools were established in Keidan. Many of the expelled Jews returned to Keidan from Russia, and with great trouble eventually succeeded in recovering their stolen homes. Many Jews who were not from Keidan originally settled in the city, and once again the Jewish community began to grow.

The old city of Keidan was reconstituted as a municipality under the free Lithuanian republic. But without the rich Russian hinterland, at odds with Poland over Vilna, in dispute with Germany because of the loss of the port city Memel, Lithuania was cut off from the outside

world. It was a country without industries, without exports or imports, with impoverished farmlands and stripped forests. Keidan was poor, had no sources of income and no foreseeable prospects for improvement. The Jews sustained themselves with gardening, handicrafts, small trade and some support from overseas relatives.

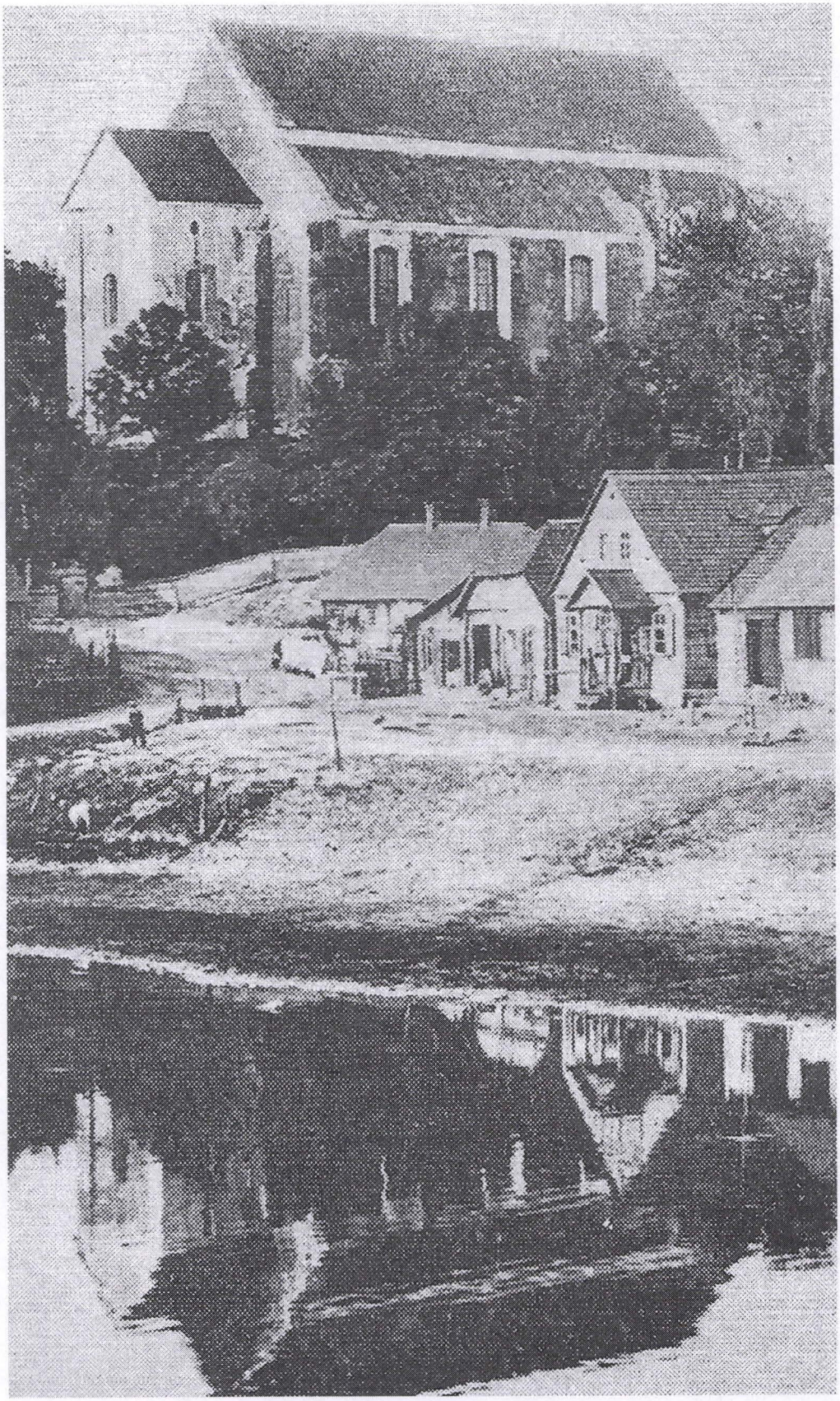
The chaotic political situation in Lithuania naturally plays havoc with the economy. Antisemitism, which keeps the Jews downtrodden in this free republic, also holds back development and delays Lithuania's recovery.

The country awaits a new Gediminas – he who understood that Lithuania's development required a free Jewish community with equal rights. It also needs a new Christopher Radziwill – he who attracted a large Jewish population and granted them full and equal rights, turning Keidan into one of the most important cities in Zamut.

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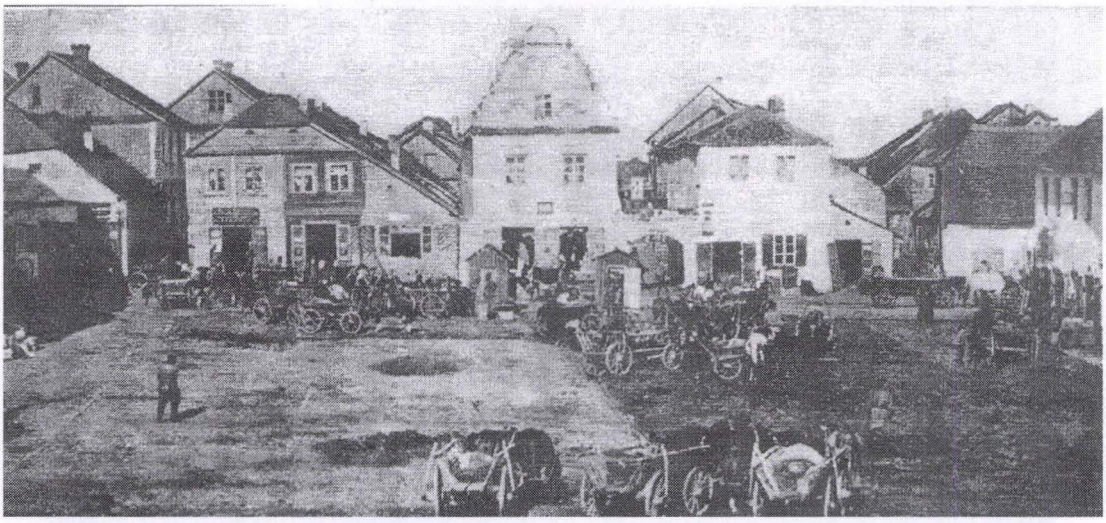
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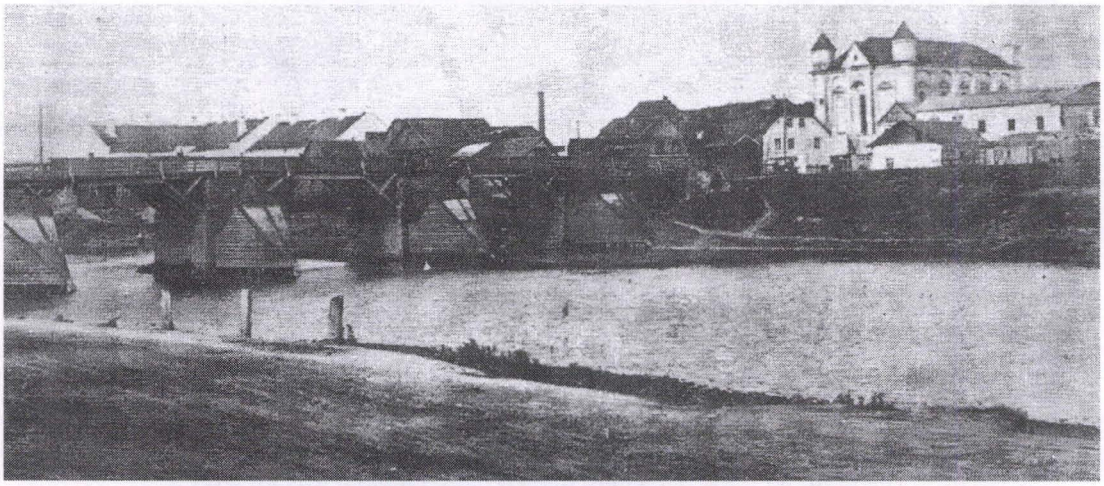
The church on the hill where once a pagan temple was located



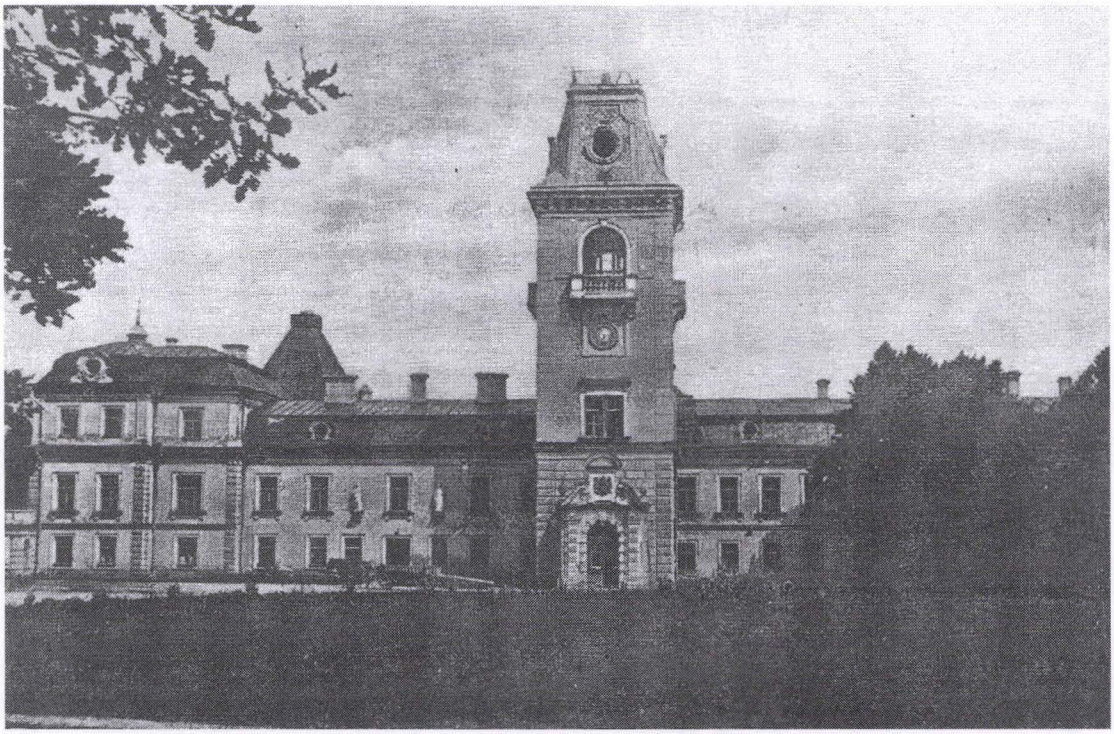
The town hall



A part of the market place



The bridge over Nevyazhe river and the Calvinist church on the right



The tower and the central entrance to the castle built by Czapski



Moshe Leib Lilienblum



The Count Marian Czapski

Worte des tiefgefühlten Dankes

An Sr. Gräfl. Gnaden, den Kammerherrn und Marschall des Gubernium,

den Grafen

Marjan von Zapski,

den Schirmherrn, Fürsprecher und Wohlthäter;

bei Gelegenheit

der Ueberreichung eines Pokals

zur Erinnerung an Seine hochherzige Unterstützung und Förderung

der neuen Synagoge zu Kaidan.

Des Herren Tempel sah man einst vom Schutt erstehen,
Als König Cyrus ward vom Gottesgeist erfüllt,
Der sprach: „Ich ebene vor Dir die stolzen Höhen,
Ich gebe Schätze Dir, in Dunkelheit gehüllt!"

Auch Du, dem Cyrus gleich, erfüllt von heil'gem Triebe,
Auch Du, o edler Fürst, mit einem Herz voll Liebe,
Hast Dich uns zugewandt, die wir Dir untergeben,
Hast unsern Bau gegründet, des Tempels Bild im Kleinen.
Dort wird ein Dankgebet für Dich uns stets vereinen:
Es möge Dir der Herr des Cyrus Segen geben:

„So spricht der Ewige von seinem Gesalbten — Ich fasse vor
Dir einher und stelze Höhen ebne ich — und gebe Dir Schätze
der Finsterniß und verborgene Reichthümer" (Jes. XLV, 2—3).

Im Namen der beglückten Gemeinde

unterthänigst dargebracht

im Monat September 1857

von

Sal. Berenstein.

תודה תהלה וברכה

מערכה בישראל בקהל קדש קידאן יצא.

ליחום חשר האזיר והחמחם, רוחף צדקה וחסר, גיבב נדיבות יקר, הגבר הוקם על מאזנים והקיסר ירח, ויקרא לו בשם: קאמבעלר " הערר, ויכחו: באראשאל העובערגיום. והא ראיה נראה

מרין מאן צאפסקי:

ה' ישמרהו וידונו!

אשר רוח נדיבתו מסכתם, לסיד ולבנות בית תפלה ומקדש, וידוך ידם, מהמרוסים את ידיהם ומבהלים אותם ומוכרים עליהם יקעצים לחסר את עצתם: זכרה לו אלהי למובה!

מִי זֶה מֶלֶךְ לִבְנוֹת בַּיִת אֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הָעִיר
רוּחַ כּוֹרֶשׁ רוּחַ נְדִיבָה כִּי הוּא הֵעִיר.
וַיִּכְנוּ חֹק: לְפָנֶיךָ אֵלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר תְּרוֹרִים.
נָתַתִּי לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ מַטְמֻנֵי מִסְתָּרִים.
צְדָקוֹת לְבָשְׁתָּ כְּמוֹ כוֹרֶשׁ, בְּמוֹרוֹ רוּחַךְ נְדִיבָה:
אַתָּה צַאפְסְקִי חָשַׁבְתָּ: כָּלֵב שָׁלֵם וּבְאַהֲבָה
פָּנִיתָ אֵלֵינוּ. תִּסְפֹּר תְּמוּכָה: אִם יְמֻנָּה?
תַּמְכְתָּנוּ בְּמוֹתֶבֶת לְבָנִים, לֵאמֹר: מְקֻדָּשׁ מְעַט יִבָּנֶה!
בֵּן נִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה נִיָּא בְעֵרֶךְ תְּפִלָּה:
יְבָרֶכְךָ ה' וּכְמוֹ לְמֹרֶשׁ אֵלֶיךָ יֹאמַר מִלָּה: —

אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֵלֵךְ וְהֶרִים אֲשֶׁר . . . . וְאֶתְּנָה לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וּמַטְמֻנֵי מִסְתָּרִים

(ישעי' מ"ה, ב' ג')

ותכתה חשורת חמאת לפניך לעד: כי לא תשכח משיט לעולם, ושפך חשוב משפטן והכתוב על טט חכסף אשר הסרבנו לכנדך, כי נכספנו לך. ולשפך חאת בשפט חמיד. חכריזך חמהקה על חקיר על לוח אבן שיה בבית חקדש. מוכרזן. עד דור אחרון. כי לא ישוש וברך. ולא ימוט סעולות צדקך עם אויט בני ישראל בעודנו סעל לוח לבנו לצמיתי —

בשם המשתדים

בדפוש אולו הרין לפיק

שלמה בערענשטין.

Paroles de la plus profonde reconnaissance,

dédiées

au protecteur, patron et bienfaiseur,

le Comte

Marjan de Zapski,

Chamberlain, Maréchal du Gouvernement etc.

et présentées avec un pocal,

souvenir de Sa haute protection et générosité

pour la nouvelle synagogue de Kaidan.

Jadis le temple de Jerusalem sur ses ruines s'elevait,
Quand au roi Cyre l'esprit de Dieu parlait:
„J'applanerai les monts les plus superbes devant toi,
„Je te donnerai les tresors, que l'oeil de l'homme ne voit."

Aussi Vous, comme Cyre, d'un coeur zelé et pieux,
Vous donnez, Prince noble, protecteur genereux,
A vos sujets de l'amour le plus touchant exemple,
Supportant par Vos graces un petit image du temple.
Aussi nous y prierons toujours pour Votre noblesse,
Que Dieu Vous benisse, comme Cyre, de sa promesse:

„C'est ainsi que Dieu parle a son oint . . J'irai devant toi
et j'applanerai les monts superbes . . je te donnerai les tresors
de tenebres et des richesses secretes." (Isai. XLV, 2—3).

Dedié

au nom de la communité Juive

au mois de Septembre 1857.

par le tres humble serviteur

Sal. Berenstein.

A proclamation of thanks to the Count Marian Czapski



Train station with the restaurant

On the Threshold of 20th Century

על סף המאה ה- 20

An Old and New World *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 43-64*

Bernard Gershon Richards
(Reprinted by permission of Paula Eisenstein Baker, Houston)

Bernard Gershon Richards (1877-1971), U.S- journalist, widely active in Jewish affairs. Born Dov-Gershon Rabinovich in Keidan (Kedainiai), Lithuania, Richards was taken to the U.S. in 1886. He began his journalistic career as a reporter on the *Boston Post*, and wrote for several Boston and New York papers, as well as for Yiddish and other Jewish journals, including *The American Hebrew* and *The New Palestine*. He also edited the magazine *New Era*. From 1906 to 1911 Richards served as secretary of the Jewish Community of New York City, an organization designed to further the cause of Judaism, and in 1915 helped found the American Jewish Congress, of which he was executive director until 1932. At the end of World War I he was a member of the American Jewish delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference. He also founded the Jewish Information Bureau of Greater New York (1932) and the American Jewish Institute, N.Y. (1942) to further adult education. He was director of both these institutions. He was also a member of the Zionist Organization of America, and his revised edition of I. Cohen's *The Zionist Movement* (1946) included a supplementary chapter of his own on Zionism in the U.S. His other books were *The Discourses of Keidansky* (1903), and *Organizing American Jewry* (1947). His papers are in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, N.Y. *(Encyclopedia Judaica)*

Chapter 1

My first childhood recollections go back to early mornings in my grandfather's house at the end of Smilger *Gas* in the Lithuanian town of Keidan. I remember fearfully cold mornings when the windows were covered with ornate designs wrought by the frost, allowing but little daylight to enter the dim *stoob*[41], or living room. It was lit up only by a smoky kerosene lamp, sometimes augmented by candles and burning *balonas*, or faggots, stuck into crevices of the huge brick oven. I recall the crunching of the snow and ice under the creaking wheels of the peasant wagons passing our front door on their way to the market to dispose of their products. After a while the blazing fire in the stove would add illumination and warmth and cheer to the room.

My maternal grandfather, Yakov Herz Sirk – everybody called him Herz Yankel – usually rose with the first signs of dawn. Often he got up ahead of the dawn. "I work fast, I eat fast, I sleep fast," he would say. He loved company and conversation so much that whichever grandson was staying with him at the time was roused from his sleep soon after the fire was lighted and the morning activities begun. His method of waking the household was to walk through all the rooms and call out, "Get up, *kinder* – it's six, seven, eight, nine o'clock! Get up, *kinder.*" Or he would announce to my grandmother that it was high time to get up and start household affairs going because "*der betler is schein in zibetn dorf!* (the itinerant beggar has already reached his seventh village!)."

For the visiting little grandson to climb down from the high warm sleeping perch built into the oven, to dress and wash and hurry through the morning prayers, the incentive was the privilege of participating in all the early household operations. There was wood chopping, there were odd repair jobs around the house, butter churning, preparations for cheese making, to say nothing of feeding the cow and the chickens and perhaps a goose or a couple of ducks. If the domestic animals – including the all-wise Spitzka, the dog – had been increased in numbers by the arrival of a new-born calf, then the barn back of the house was the special center of attraction.

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[41] Litvak pronounciation of the Yiddish word for a small dwelling, *shtub*.

My grandfather was not satisfied with the regular arrangement for the pasture of his cow in summertime. A Polish peasant boy would come every morning, assemble all the "Jewish cows" from our street in a vacant field, and then drive them all to a field "up the hill," a distant and nebulous spot. At the close of the day the boy would bring them back to the border of the town: then, ready to be milked and fed, the animals would come plodding through the streets and find their respective homes and barns. My grandfather, however, must needs get in an hour of pre-official pasture. When it was still dark he would take the cow out and give her a special treat of some high, sweet, luscious grass, in a spot near the town that only he knew how to find.

In all the household chores, multiplied by the restless energy of my grandfather, the six-or seven-year old grandson somehow was credited with making practical suggestions and thus was prematurely promoted to chief assistant and advisor, In this elevation he undoubtedly found compensation for the minor status bestowed upon him by two elder brothers, who always played more vigorously, fought harder, ran faster, and swam better than he did.

My grandfather's intrusions and improvisations in the housekeeping tasks of the family were largely actuated, aside from the need of letting out his surplus energy, by the special interests of the domestic animals. Whether handling cereals, cutting bread, or preparing vegetables or fruits for cooking, he would so manage as to leave behind sufficient surplus or waste to benefit beast or fowl. My grandmother Reva, rising much later than her husband, would be horrified to find several pots filled with peeled potatoes, beets, mound of peelings so thick and lavish as to redound only to the advantages of the livestock. Then too, as the amount of vegetables prepared was far above the immediate needs of the family, the animals would benefit some more. Grandmother would scold in her mild, restrained manner. Grandfather would explain and apologize. But he remained incorrigible, just as he never ceased being proud and boastful among his nighbors of the fine, sleek appearance of his animals. As for the exploits of Spitzka, faithful guardian of the home, protector of the chickens and the ducks, the children and the grandchildren – Spitzka, who one dark night returned from a distance of over fifty miles, after having been sold, for a sum much needed by the family, to a dog-fancying *poritz*, or landowner – how could one stop talking about Spitzka?

My grandfather's home, where I spent so much of my childhood, is more familiar to me than the successive domiciles of my parents. Grandfather's house, built of logs partially covered with boards in the primitive manner of the time, was the last but one on the street named after the river Smilga and paralleling its winding course. In the rear of the houses were truck gardens extending to the river's bank. This was the lower end of the town. The last house on the street, also built of logs, with a straw-thatched roof, belonged to my grandmother's brother, Baruch Kamber, whose family hailed from a *dorf*, or farm settlement, not far from Keidan, called Kaneberaz[42]. The road at the end of the street, passing the soldier's barracks and stables on the right and the drill grounds on the left, led to the open country with fields and woods on all sides.

A quarter of a mile above the town was the bridge that crossed the deep, wide Navyaza[43] River, into which the Smilga flowed. Farther away, about four miles from the town in the other direction, was the railroad station, a place of special wonder to the children, who would occasionally be taken there.

The arrival of the train, pulled by a bellowing and clanging engine, the ceremonial waving by the flagman to hold back all bystanders, the formal salute of the stationmaster to the conductors in their military-style uniforms as they alighted from the cars and in most resounding Russian announced the name of the station and the length of the stop, the

[42] Kalnaberžė, 13 km north of Kedainiai.

[43] Neviazhe

emotional meetings between arriving passengers and their friends, the frantic farewells as the loud bell over the engine signaled imminent departure - this was enough thrilled excitement to last a young lifetime.

The railroad was of course our chief means of communication and contact with the great world outside, or at least with the large cities of Russia, which then held Lithuania as well as Poland under its domination. Beyond were far-off marvelous cities and lands about which we children spun our fancies, drawing upon tales we heard from our elders about Germany, France, England, and, above all, miraculous America, to which a good number of natives had betaken themselves and from which they sent letters describing incredible happenings.

Down the open road, which connected with the outlying farm settlements of Lithuanian and Polish peasants, came all the traffic from those sections. The farmers, with their crude wooden wagons heavily loaded and drawn by stalwart country horses, wended their way up Smilger Gas to the center of the town and the main market place.

It was the practice of the small traders and brokers, the *hendlers* and *meklers* of Keidan, to converge on this street and walk down the road as far as the bridge in the early morning of the market. Accosting the incoming farmers, they would start negotiations with them while in transit. "What have you to sell?" was the usual question: "*Zo mas pseditz?*" in Polish, "*Ko turo pardot*?" in the more difficult Lithuanian.

If the two parties hit it off, or if they knew each other from previous dealings, the peasant would invite the prospective purchaser or agent to jump on the wagon and take a seat beside him. They would continue their discussion as they rode on together toward the center of the town. The subject of their bargaining might be several bushels of wheat or corn[44], or a few bags of potatoes, or some pairs of ducks or chickens contained in a covered basket in the back of the wagon. If a price was agreed upon, the trader would ride with his host into the town, looking proud of his capture of business. In less favorable circumstances the trader would walk along beside the farmer's wagon until his final offer was either accepted or rejected.

Some of these *hendlers* and *meklers* were old colleagues and cronies of my grandfather, and his warm and always hospitable house at the foot of the street, in the path of their pursuit of trade, offered a welcome retreat on stormy and bitterly cold winter days. These early morning visitors would be asked to join us at the frugal breakfast table and offered some hot tea or coffee with perhaps a bagel or a slice of challah. After hours of exposure to the raw and biting Russian frost this was a most grateful opportunity to warm up and relax for a few minutes.

Above this bleak existence of uncertainty and privation as I now recall it, over this sordid haggling and bargaining, rose a gleam of hope for those harried people, beckoning like a rainbow of promise – from far-off America. To that land of mystery and wonder some of our younger neighbors and friends had emigrated, traveling singly in advance of their families. Some of the older and less adventurous denizens of our town had sent their sons to explore the new country. These husbands and sons soon sent rosy reports and remittances that served not only to raise the spirits of their families but to keep the Russian wolf from the door.

During their fleeting moments of rest the motley and weary chasers after the perambulating market would stop to dilate on their news from the distant and incredible land. Not the least quaint feature of these conversations was the naming of the various centers of population in the New World from which letters and messages and money had been received. Outside of New York and Brooklyn, cities less known, like Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, were bewildering appellations. Philadelphia was called "the Second America," Boston "the Third,"

[44] Meaning barley or rye, not maize or Indian corn.

Baltimore "the Fourth"; and any new city discovered was given a higher number, until perhaps Chicago became "the Sixteenth America."

Reflecting upon episodes of those distant days I recall, more distinctly than other incidents in my boyhood, not the turmoil attending my arrival in America – with the excitement of entering Castle Garden and being taken on another long journey to a place called Brooklyn – but my return from the United States to my native town of Keidan. Then I had the thrill of being hailed as "an American boy," a strange phenomenon who was followed and admired for months, and whose unfamiliar English speech was listened to with wide-eyed awe and wonder.

Like most immigrants of that time before the turn of the century, my father had sailed for America ahead of the family with the expectation, which all those doughty explorers shared, of sending for their wives and children a year or two later, after securing an economic foothold. But my father did rather better, or worse. He had proceeded to the New World with the eldest of three boys, and he sent for the rest of the family after a little less than a year, long before he was well enough established in his small dry-goods business.

My mother's retiring nature and almost morbid dread of change and excitement, her rustic small-town habits of life, her utter inability to adjust herself to the bustle and rush of New York existence – even in those calmer days – served to aggravate a situation which was much more difficult and complicated than the average problem of adaptation to a new, bewildering environment. After prolonged discussion in the family circle and consultations with *landsleit* over a period of more than a year, it was decided that my mother and the two younger children – myself, aged eight, and a younger sister, of seven – return to the home country to live with our grandparents in Keidan. Since the old folks had their own home, with some small means of subsistence, it seemed best that we stay with them for a year or two, or until such time as my father should be more firmly settled in the new land.

Traveling back to Europe we experienced anew all the hardships, perplexities, and mishaps of steerage passengers. Then the long train journey through Germany, from Hamburg to Kovno, with many changes, stopovers, and losses of baggage, caused my mother such anxiety and anguish that she was driven to distraction. Whatever luggage was left, after most of it had been lost or stolen on the way, was taken in charge by pretended travel agent or guides who offered to befriend us in the name of some society. They managed to take us across the frontier all right but they never came back with the bags and satchels of clothes they had promised to deliver. We were pushed and hustled into another train before we could ask any questions.

At the station four miles out of Keidan we arrived with only one traveling basket of belongings. But we wore American clothes, and that was enough to attract attention.

No sooner had the crude wooden wagon that served as a *droshke* driven up to our grandfather's house than we became the cynosure of all eyes. All the neighbors of Smilger Gas flocked to the end of the street and surrounded the house to catch a glimpse of the new arrivals from the far-off land of wonder. Those who were not invited, or could not be accommodated indoors, shamelessly stared in through the low windows of the small house to see the guests from abroad. All day long, people went back and forth, peeping, tiptoeting, expostulating and chattering about the Americans who had come to Keidan, and especially about the "American children."

After a day or two the hubbub subsided. No longer afraid of the advances of the curiosity-seekers, my sister and I at length ventured out of doors to renew our acquaintance with the street, the things around the house, the vegetable patches in back of the row of houses. These sloping grounds, when cleared of their harvests, were trampled on by the youngsters of the neighborhood for a direct route to the pebbly and purling river running below. But instead of their usual frolic and play at the riverside, the children persisted in following tbe two

young *Amerikaner* around, plying them with questions, and above all straining their ears to hear the strange, outlandish American language they spoke.

Whether, pathetically enough, we were striving to retain our knowledge of the few precious English words we had brought from the marvelous land whence we had been ruthlessly torn away, or whether we sought, childlike, to show off our accomplishments, we did lapse into English, such as it was, every now and then, and our former playmates listened spellbound. How pitifully limited that vocabulary was, how halting the speech, how hopelessly intermixed it was with Yiddish expressions (it may have been only Americanized Yiddish), there was no one present to determine. Nor did anyone within our hearing know that, while I had attended public school in Brooklyn for several weeks my sister had had no such advantage and had picked up the few words she knew from hearing them pronounced, or rather mispronounced, at home or on the street. Yet our conversations in the unknown tongue were listened to by young and old with intense interest and admiration.

There was one red-letter day which may well have been entered in the *pinkes*, the official register of the community, among the records of expanding relations, transactions, and communications between obscure Keidan and the grand New World beyond the seas. That day a full-fledged "American," an adult native who had returned, walked up the road with our little man. Both displayed their American attire, and both conversed in the outlandish but fascinating language. Getzel Glusonock, back from the United States after a sojourn of four years, may have wished only to question the boy about where he had lived there, and at the same time perhaps indulge in a little practice in the baffling and fast-slipping language. Whatever his motive, he surely was not conscious of the sensation he was to create.

It was on a Saturday afternoon, when many of the burghers with their families were out for their Sabbath walk, wending their way up the road at the end of town that led to the highway, the railroad station, and the great world beyond. Some boisterous and romping youngsters had passed the word, "They are talking English!" There was a rush of old and young to follow them closely, to overhear their talk, so that the conversationalists were plainly disconcerted by the eager intruders. Nevertheless, Mr. Glusonock was too proud of his knowledge to quail before the distraction of many eyes and ears. So the dialogue, meager and monosyllabic though it was, went on until the enthusiastic pursuers grew weary of hearing sounds whose meaning they did not understand, and the cluster of people gradually fell away. Walking back, my fellow American and I reached the Smilger Gas and parted.

As far as hazy memory can produce, our talk proceeded something like this:

"How long you in America?"

"Two years nearly."

"Where you live?"

"Brooklyn!"

"You go to school?"

"Yes, four weeks."

"What grade?"

"I no remember."

"You like America?"

"Very much!"

"Why you come back?"

"My mother no like."

"Oh. Here you like to stay?"

"Am glad to see my *bobe* and *zaide*."

"You going back to America, bye and bye?"

"Sure when I grow big."

After this encounter, Mr. Glusonock often noticed and spoke to me on the street. It was always; "Well, how you getting along here? When you go back to America?"

I would answer in a vague and general manner, not being able to announce any family plans. But it was always enough of an incomprehensible conversation to make any bystanders prick up their ears and listen. After a while, however, these salutations became less frequent, and the English words and sounds and names gradually faded and became obliterated from memory, just as my American *kapelush* (blocked hat), my jacket, knickers, and shoes grew discolored and dilapidated.

My heart sank as these outward insignia of the new life abroad were gradually discarded. I donned long pants with the bottoms shoved into high boots, put on a Russian shirt and longish coat and a cap with shining black visor, after the fashion of Keidan. I was no longer an American.

I was soon indistinguishable from the forty-odd other little boys of similar appearance with whom I sat at the long tables of the *cheder* (Hebrew school), reciting the Bible lessons in singsong and plaintive melody, and there was hardly any trace left of former distinction among these pupils and playmates. It was five years before I was shipped back, as a lone boy-passenger, to the United States; and it took much longer for the other members of my family to return to the New World.

Chapter 2

In our family's difficult situation, incident to the struggle for existence in a small town like Keidan, without industry and with a minimum of commerce, we children were continually being farmed out one or two at a time, to our maternal grandparents. After all, in their house at the end of the town they had plenty of room; they had milk from their own cow, and fruits and vegetables were obtainable from all the incoming vendors on their way from the country to market. Besides, *Bobe* and especially *Zaide* loved to putter around and busy themselves with the preparations for cooking big meals.

In cases of emergency my grandfather would hurry over to our parents' place and carry one of us children off to his house in his arms. I remember that on one occasion – probably

because I was snatched from my play without warning – I became quite unruly while he was carrying me and took off his hat and threw it on the ground, thus exposing him to the shame of appearing bareheaded on the street.

Left to the care of my mother's parents, the Sirks, so much of the time, I have only vague recollection of my own parents' home during those early years. It is strange, and I am troubled in mind when I strain to invoke a clearer picture of my father and mother and the separate or independent life of our family. I remember hazily a little grocery store on a small cross street between Smilger Gas and Langer Gas, which was the fashionable business street. I remember climbing up a winding, rickety staircase to our small apartment over the store. The rooms were nearly always in a state of disarray, as most of the day my mother was downstairs tending the store. This was the time when my father, Sender Rabinovich, Talmudic scholar and Hebrew teacher willy-nilly turned merchant, was trying his luck at a shipping enterprise centered in Libau, the port of the Baltic province of Kurland, in which my grandfather and my uncle Zadick were involved. This took him away from home for a large part of the year and made the task of my mother, a shy, modest, and quiet person, least qualified for merchandising, all the harder.

I recall my mother, her comely features and eyes expressive of continual good nature often clouded by anxiety, making hurried trips to the Sirk homestead to see if all was well with the offspring placed in the care of her elderly parents. In my memory the stern, almost forbidding image of my father, his clear-cut features framed in a heavy black beard, his penetrating dark eyes shadowed by bushy brows, is softened by the recollection of his habitual humming of ritual melodies in a low, musical voice. There is a fading out of my father's image, for our family was on the verge of emigration, and my remembrance of him reappears in vivid form several years later, in the very different settings provided by the New World.

Both my elder brothers, Leibe and Sachna, and my sister, Rochele, who was the youngest, were at frequent intervals sheltered and cared for in the old, rather bare, but warm and cheerful Sirk domicile. Our grandparents must have often deprived themselves, but they always saw to it that the grandchildren were well fed – only the domestic animals had higher priority! – and that the boys were sent off to *cheder* well protected against hunger and cold.

Vacations from *cheder* were limited to Sabbaths and holy days. On these days – except for some of the lesser festivals – we could not enter into the strenuous exercises that would come under the ban of forbidden labor. But in the summer the longer afternoons would afford opportunities for all kinds of excursions and adventures. We would weave baskets out of fresh twigs, fashion willow whistles from willow branches, pick wild berries in the woods, roam and romp in distant and forbidden territory and worry our parents and guardians by our lateness in returning. The older boys, of course, scorned the Smilga, which at times during the hot weather shrank to a mere brook that one could cross by stepping on stones. The first boast of any boy who had attained the status of bar mitzvah was that he could swim the Navyaza, the large river crossing the upper part of the town, to which the Smilga was a tributary. But to us smaller children the Smilga was a boon, an endless source of amusement and diversion. We would float boats, build miniature bridges, collect pebbles, and wade and splash to our hearts' content.

Dwindling in the summer time, swelling in the spring and fall seasons, and furnishing a fine skating spot in the winter, the Smilga invited all kinds of play activity, and these required varied contrivances for building, spanning, and navigating the stream. Only the crudest implements were at our disposal, and the little homemade shovels and picks were poor instruments for bridge-building and canal dredging, just as the store-bought penknives, with wooden handles and iron blades always at odds, hindered the efforts to carve and float our small boats and sailing vessels. In the face of this frustration we were able to score at least one great achievement when the youngest of my maternal uncles, Schneur Zalman, produced a ferryboat that for a long time remained the wonder of all the boys on Smilger Gas.

With a stout and substantial penknife having several sharp blades, which must have been brought to him from a large city, perhaps Libau, my uncle was able to carve and build a ferry that surpassed anything we had ever seen in our town. Propellers, a main deck surrounded by railings and gates, a cabin with windows and doors, a captain's bridge with awning and flag flying above – all these combined to fill us youngsters with awe and amazement. We had never even seen a picture of such a vessel. Looking back at this incident I can only surmise that the builder, a young yeshiva student, had somehow caught a glimpse of a print that had found its way to our town. When the ferryboat, attached to a cord, floated down the Smilga, a shout of joy and excitement went up from the boys on the shore which was heard all over the street.

Beyond the construction and floating of the ferryboat, I have only the dimmest recollection of my uncle Schneur Zalman. He was named after a great rabbi, the founder of the *Chabad*, or rational, branch of Hasidism, to which my grandfather gave allegiance, but he did not live to fulfill the promise of that great name or of his own angelic face and almost unearthly sweetness and kindliness. For all his gentleness, he was strangely elusive and aloof. I remember him sitting and whittling and carving for hours, totally absorbed in his inventions and contrivances. Whether I was too young to comprehend or was shielded from the fact, I did not realize, when we no longer saw him, that he had died, and I did not know till many years later that he was one of three or four children lost in their youth by my grandfather and grandmother Sirk.

The meek and unobtrusive Smilga, which in the dry, hot weather was content to assume the form of a rivulet, babbling quietly over its pebbly bottom, was not so modest when the cold and rainy season arrived. Then it would swell and spread and encroach upon the land, cultivated or not, belonging to the homesteads on our street. In the spring, when the heavy piles of snow and ice covering the countryside would suddenly melt, the little river would become a torrent, inundating all our backyards and garden plots and even threatening our houses. It was usually during the Passover week that, instead of our having to go down to the river for buckets of water, it would come to us, flowing right into the house. My grandfather's house and that of his brother-in-law, Baruch Kamber, next door, were situated on lower plots of ground and were more exposed to the onrush of water than any of the other houses on the street. I have recollections of some exciting adventures when both houses were flooded up to the windowsills.

One Passover, my brother Leibe and some otber big boys rigged up rafts and waded into the water in high boots to rescue the matzoth and other provisions. That year our grandfather's house was so badly flooded that we were taken in by our neighbors across the road, on the hill opposite our house, and celebrated the holiday with them. Our host, Yudel the brazier, and his wife and two grown daughters made room not only for us but for the cow and the chickens and, of course, Spitzka, the dog, always welcome everywhere on the Gas. It was sad and rather awkward to be observing the joyous festival of Pesach as temporary lodgers, but these good neighbors did everything possible to cheer us up and make us comfortable. We children tended to treat the event as something of a lark. The waters would recede in a few days and we would return to our home, but this could not happen until after my *zaide*, with the help of the *Shabbos goy* Adamowitz, had cleaned out the mud and debris brought by the flood and Chone the plasterer had repaired the damaged walls. Then we would all come back, tired and sleepy, as if returning from a long and tedious journey.

The floods did not come every spring, and when they did come they did not always interrupt the Passover, but from time to time they imposed a serious hardship upon my grandparents and other residents of the lower section of Smilga Gas.

But the real scourge of the old-time Jewish settlements in Lithuania – largely made up of wooden houses, their shingled or thatched roofs dried out by the hot summer sun and as inflammable as tinder – was fire. Firefighting provisions and appliances were, of course,

unknown. The destruction of their house by sudden outbreaks of flame would often leave a family destitute and reduce them to a state of beggardom. Indeed, the mendicants who came from distant points and appeared at our doors in Keidan, waiting for a penny or a slice of bread, were in many cases the victims of fires that had occurred in their home towns. They were called *nishrofim* ("burnt ones"), and within the limits of the means of their poverty-stricken benefactors they were given special consideration.

The great conflagration that occurred in Keidan shortly before my departure for the New World remains one of my most vivid memories. Almost the whole of Keidan, or at least the largest part of the houses on the Smilga Gas and two side streets, burned down. The fire broke out late in the evening; by midnight many houses were aflame and the town was in a panic, as a scarlet, threatening sky struck greater and greater fear into the hearts of the residents. It was in the fall of the year, and a brisk wind was driving the flames from the upper end of the Smilger Gas closer and closer to my grandfather's house and the houses of his immediate neighbors. The wind and flames were threatening the *shulhoyf*, or synagogue grounds, with the Great Synagogue (*Grosse Shul*) and the auxiliary place of worship known as the *Kloyz*. On the big military training fields at the foot of the street we and all our neighbors assembled with our packs and bundles of belongings, the women praying aloud in their traditional mournful singsong, asking God to spare from the fiery blast at least the houses of prayer.

It appeared to us as if their supplications were answered, for the wind finally subsided, removing the danger to the sacred buildings and nearby houses, and giving the volunteer rescue teams an opportunity to check the fire and salvage some of the household wares. With no equipment or experience these amateur firemen accomplished much, reducing the suffering and the losses that their townsmen might otherwise have sustained. These were surely brave men and stalwart – among them, the professional *tregers*, or carriers, accustomed to bearing heavy burdens of grain, flour, and vegetables from farmers' wagons to stores and mills. They carried the furniture and household goods from many homes to the empty fields, lifting the heaviest objects with what seemed to us children amazing ease. In no time the drill ground was covered with furniture, furnishings, and other belongings of many houses of our street, the whole area filled with families sitting on their piles of goods and pieces of furniture, all hugging their belongings like refugees. There we stayed until the small hours of the morning, the children huddled up against their mothers, the mothers trying to comfort them, and all of us falling off to sleep after we knew that the worst of the calamity was over. The houses of about one quarter of our long street were spared. Wearily we dragged ourselves back the next morning, the giant-like *tregers* again rendering yeoman's service in carrying all belongings back to the houses. The upper part of our street and another section of the town were in ruins or entirely bereft of houses, with only foundation stones visible and tall chimneys standing like monuments of desolation. Some of the householders had insurance on their homes, attached to little stores or places of business, and others may have had nest-eggs or *kniplach* put away: in any case, the rapidity with which most of the victims of the fire put up flimsy board shanties, especially for stores, and then built more solidly constructed houses than they had before - the way all this happened was another evidence of the perpetual resilience and recuperative powers of the ghetto.

Chapter 3

In the early morning hours my grandfather's cronies and fellow-traders, followers of the market caravans of the farmers bringing their products to town, would come in to snatch a bite or breakfast and rush out again to the creaking of the lumbering wagons. There was the tall and burly Leibe Kamber, son of Baruch, who would always linger a little longer, and, though protesting that he had had his breakfast, would ravenously devour a bagel or a slice of bread before he suddenly disappeared. Leibe had married and settled in a large city in

Russia proper, where he was presumed to have been prospering as a merchant. But now he and his family were back in Keidan, and he had returned to the onerous occupation of following the perambulating market. Though his aged father and invalid mother, Neche, lived next door, he would come to my gandfather's house for cheer and recreation, being satisfied merely to inquire about his parents, whose house at this early hour showed no signs of activity. I could not fully understand the stream of talk of Leibe and my *zaide* about events in the great outside world, but I caught some words and phrases that were as fascinating as they were mysterious, reflecting as they did rumored great events abroad.

Somewhat later Leibe left Keidan and returned to the large Russian city of his former sojourn and to a more successful career, and there was a day when his eldest son, Yitzhak, came back to visit his grandparents wearing the colorful uniform of a Russian umversity student – an extraordinary and stirring sight to us children of Keidan.

My grandfather, advancing in years and suffering from occasional attacks of rheumatism, was no longer active in business – retirement was an unknown concept in those days and regions. He now depended for his modest needs upon his two sons and on periodic earnings of his own. In general he belonged to the class of traders, brokers, or middlemen but he was exceptional in that in the heyday of his enterprises he negotiated large transactions such as the sale of farms, woodlands, or large quantities of grain or flax or the wholesale disposal of the fruit of an entire orchard. A man of handsome appearance, immaculate about his person, he was adept in the language and ways of the country, and his jovial, cheerful nature as well as a flair for the jocular, assured him of easy approach to outstanding landowners of the region, even to the Polish *schlachtzi*[45], or noblemen, who, clinging to their aristocratic pretensions, were still haughty and proud, though often land-poor and embarrassed for ready cash. My grandfather would advise or assist them in arranging for sales of property or obtaining loans, and whatever the outcome of these tangled transactions, they would always remain his friends.

Even at the time of which I write, when he was no longer able to carry on his former activities, farmers and landowners, including some notables, would come to his shabby little house on lower Smilger Gas to consult and converse or exchange the latest gossip or humorous anecdotes. One of the regular visitors from among the neighboring farmers was *Pan*[46] Yankevitz. I remember him as a tall, large-limbed man who had to stoop as he passed our doorpost and whose head almost touched the ceiling. The conversations would be carried on in Polish and the subjects were beyond the grasp of us youngsters, but we sensed that the talk ranged over a wide area of matters, including emigration to America and news received from the wonderful New World. If the conversation was carried on in the more involved Lithuanian language, my grandmother, who had grown up in a Lithuanian village, was called on to clarify obscure points in the conversation.

After my grandfather had partially withdrawn from following the traffic of trade, he developed the sideline of shipping vegetables and fruits to the big Baltic city of Libau in Kurland, then also under the reign of expanded Tsarist Russia. This was the period of the settlement of his eldest son, Israel, in Libau and of the business journeys to that city first of another son, Zadick, and then of his son-in-law, my father, Sender Rabinovich, who though bearing the onus of being an outsider in the family, nevertheless for a number of years carried on a business partnership with my *zaide* and both uncles.

Libau, a notable seaport city of ancient Teuton and Baltic origin, largely German-speaking and, compared with our provinces, modern in character, also had more and closer contacts with the broader spheres of Germany, Austria, and France. Hence Libau became our chief

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[45] More commonly spelled "*szlachta*"

[46] Polish honorific, the equivalent of "Mr."

means of communication with the progressive trends of approaching new times. From Libau came *proscilkas* – packages or boxes of goodies, consisting of oranges, figs, dates, and other fruits and sweets either entirely unknown or unobtainable in our town. Through letters and visits of our kinsmen in Libau we learned of important world events. From Libau we learned of the publication of journals and books outside the range of our strictly religious literature; from Libau came my uncles, with their pleasant voices, singing the latest Jewish songs, unconnected with synagogue ritual, especially the ballads and melodies of the famous folk-singer Eliakum Zunser, whose simple Yiddish verses and artless native melodies were contrived to impart homely moral lessons to his people and lovingly to rebuke the arrogant, the wayward, and the uncharitable among them. Zunser had himself journeyed to Libau from his home in Minsk to give one of his unique concerts of songs. This homespun genius – an old-time *badkhen*, or rhymester, grown to the stature of a modern Yiddish Beranger[47] – singing or reciting his lays to the accompaniment of instrumental music, took his Libau audiences by storm, as he had conquered other communities, and he sent his listeners away humming his sweet melodies or repeating his satires on would-be aristocrats who sought to escape their fate as Jews. Enthused by these recitals, my uncles would return to Keidan with Zunser's *lieder* on their lips. They found a ready imitator in the youngest of their nephews, who had a penchant for singing and who took pride in learning by heart, second- or third-hand, these long verses and intricate melodies.

Years later I was destined to meet the poet whose songs had so deeply stirred my imagination – not anywhere in the vast empire of the Tsar but in the free, new land of America, where he had come, late in life but not too late to extol Columbus and Washington and other great American pathfinders and to admonish his own Jewish brethren to be worthy of their new destiny. I met the aged teacher and comforter of his people, now his fellow-immigrants, and his interesting family on tbe lower East Side. Here, on East Broadway, the celebrated minstrel conducted a Hebrew and Yiddish printing shop and assisted younger writers and poets to become known.

Contacts and communications created with Libau after the settlement in that city of my uncle Israel led to the establishment of the small and seasonal fruit business in which my gandfather and several members of the family took part. My uncle had studied to prepare himself for a clerical position and he had married Rachel, the daughter of Ber Meshulamy, the chief *shokhet*, or ritual slaughterer, of Libau, but he departed from his original plans to take an executive position with a firm dealing in sugar and sugar products. He himself did not participate in the fruit-shipping enterprise, but his advice and recommendations made the undertaking possible. While my father and uncle Zadick spent a large part of the summer in Libau, and with the aid of a local partner attended to the selling of the products, my grandfather at home, with some temporary assistants, handled the purchasing and shipping of the fruits and such vegetables as cucumbers, beets, and carrots. Farmers and fruit-growers from various parts of the region, upon a given signal conveyed by the word of mouth of neighbors going back and forth, would bring into town with their products baskets and tubs of luscious and fragrant fruits and come straight to the house of *Pan* Yankele. Sometimes a whole orchard of fruit would be purchased as it stood, with the trees heavily laden, the purchaser undertaking the picking and shipping of the produce.

Was my grandfather now operating under the impulse of a sort of second wind, following the trading enterprises of earlier years? The new ventures seemed to have given him a fresh youthfulness and vigor. All by himself he carried on a complicated undertaking, ordering, purchasing, superintending the packing. and shipping, running all over town to obtain carting supplies and equipment. The atmosphere would become hectic and exciting as the time approached to meet the deputing train, and *zaide*, fortified by an occasional gulp from a bottle kept at the bottom of an *almer*, or wardrobe, in a corner of the *stoob*, would issue commands

[47] 19th century French poet and songwriter, celebrated for his liberal humanitarianism.

to his helpers and loudly boast, for the benefit of passing neighbors, of prospective profits. One characteristic deal was the purchase of the entire harvest of fruits grown in the orchards of the famous estate of Count Totleben, military leader and favorite of the Tsars, whose *schloss*, or castle, outside our town was one of the showplaces of the district. This transaction, a memorable achievement in itself, was effected by negotiation with Russian agents, who had come from St. Petersburg itself: only our *zaide* could approach and properly impress such notables! My brothers, Leibe and Sachna, and myself then had the unlooked-for privilege and rare treat of entering the forbidden precincts of the vast grounds and beautiful orchards of the castle, surrounded by a high wall of brick and stone, part of which ran for half a mile along the road to the railroad station. To see the stately, palatial structure – only occasionally occupied by the fabulous overlord – and the other imposing buildings from within the gates, and to be allowed to help or to pretend to help in the picking and gathering of the fruit was an unforgettable treat.

The fruit-shipping season generally was a most enjoyable period of our young lives. My grandfather's house would then be encircled with boxes and baskets and wooden tubs and all manner of containers holding the fruits, and on beds or straw on the ground would be great piles of apples and pears and plums. These fruits, and, earlier in the season, heaping barrels of cherries, would stand there glistening in the sun while Zaide and his aides would be busily packing the produce in huge packing cases. To be part of such activity and to have our fill of such delicious edibles was to the children like a taste of paradise.

The drab childhood of a Lithuanian *shtetl*, with its long hours in *cheder*, which in the regular season even had evening sessions, was relieved and brightened in other ways during the summer months – by trips on the river Smilga, outside the town, by roaming through fields that were somehow known as Kellerke's *felder*, by picking wild berries in the woods, by bathing upstream in the fresher and deeper stretches of the river – but the fruit-shipping period furnished our most exciting childhood preoccupations.

Alongside the fruit-shipping venture, which lent zest and color to a succession of memorable summers, my grandfather from time to time undertook other business enterprises similar to those of the other traders with whom he associated. But though he was in the fraternity, he was not one of them. A certain consciousness of early achievements in a larger field, when the stakes involved the sale of woodlands and farms, seemed to have kept him aloof from the ordinary class of *mekler* and *hendler*. There was also a sense of *yiches*, of family pride, derived from rich and influential relations in a distant city, now assuming the haziness of a legend. What if these faraway haughty kinsmen spurned this rebellious and mocking young man, resented his failure to apply himself to a study and become a *lamden*, a Hebrew scholar, washed their hands of him, permitted him to go off and settle in an obscure corner of the land – what of all that? Somewhere in far off Vilna or Vilkomir[48] there were storied kinsmen who were molded out of the stuff that makes *rabonim* and *negidim*, men of learning and worldly success, and even if he did not follow in their path of both spiritual and material prosperity, he would not yield one iota in pride of heritage. He was Herz Yankel Sirk, and the mere mention of his name served as a kind of declaration of independence and a challlenge to parvenus and pretenders.

Allowing for a sense of humor that was bubbling over and for a spirit of playfulness that sought expression in pranks and practical jokes, there was undoubtedly something else that egged Reb Yankel on to mock and poke fun at his neighbors, to burlesque and mimic their simple and awkward manners. Was it a consciousness of his higher origin, a sense of superiority? There was also something of the daredevil in his makeup, with perhaps more than a touch of recklessness. Anyway, neighbors who were the butt of his irony were all around, and their homes stretched from our end of the street for some distance toward the

[48] Today, Ukmergé

center of the town, where the business section offered him most conspicuous targets for the stings of his satire in the persons of the two biggest merchants.

To begin, next door at the very bottom of our lane, there was Baruch Kamber – a brother-in-law and hence eligible for attack. Kamber was a man of huge bulk, heavy and ponderous, slow of thought, as well as of speech, just the antithesis of the quick and volatile Sirk. My grandfather would call Reb Baruch "the mountain" and he would speak of *yeshuvnikes*, country people who would not know when the Jewish holy days fell until some *karabelnik*, or itinerant peddler, came and told them – sometimes a week or a month too late. Out of deference to my grandmother, my grandfather would spare Reb Baruch from some of his observations, but if for some reason he became wrought up, he would make the grave charge that their native villager Kamber was inhospitable and refused to sell bread to strangers. Reb Baruch had two tenants, one of them, Jon Yushkewitch, occupying a little one-room apartment in the rear of the house, was accorded special and more considerate treatment as a gentile and as our official *Shabbos goy*. But this was not the case with Lieutenant Zamaroff, the shoemaker, who with his workbench and his wife and young son, lived in the *kammer*, or separate room, in the front of the house. Zamaroff was a veteran of the Russian army, who whether because of his skilled shoe-mending or because of other merits, attained the rank of *feldwebel*[49], or lieutenant – a rare honor for a Jew. On the street he would stand most erect and walk fast with a quasi-military gait. His clear reluctance to let anyone forget the grandeur of his past came in for its share of Zaide's gift for barbed mimicry.

Chapter 4

In our darkest days of want and privation, my *zaide* would describe the situation in the words of the Psalmist who speaks of the time when "the waters have come up to my soul."[50] At such times nevertheless, he was always counting on some unexpected turn of events, some piece of business – a little commission on a sale, perhaps – that would tide us over the immediate crisis. He would call it a *sposob*[51], using a Slavic term unknown to me; something would turn up. Again he would invoke the Psalmist and say, "I lift mine eyes unto the mountains and ask whence comes my help."[52] The awaited help from heaven became mystically associated with a far-off land where, as Israel Zangwill was to say so many years later, God was "making the American."[53]

Our destiny gradually became interwoven with the distant and nebulous United States, as one member of our family after another, without any knowledge or equipment, ventured forth, crossing unknown and frightening seas, to put his hands to the fashioning of a new life. First my father and eldest brother Leibe (hereafter, Louis) entered upon the long journey after exciting preparations and tearful, choking goodbyes. Then my Uncle Zadick (hereafter, Simon) broke off a fragile engagement arranged by a *shadchen*, or marriage broker, while on a visit to Verbelova, the home of the bride-to-be; this town being, conveniently close to the German frontier, he crossed the border and made his way to the seaport of Bremen, notifying his parents by letter of his fateful decision.

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[49]A term more typically used to describe a non-commissioned officer, roughly equal to sergeant.

[50]Psalms, 69:1

[51]Russian for "method"

[52]Psalms, 121:1

[53]From Zangwill's 1908 play, "The Melting-Pot"

If not my father, at least Uncle Zadick and other kinsmen and townsmen began to establish themselves, and reports of incipient prosperity were encouraging to future prospectors. The lure of America later was felt even in the attractive port city of Libau, where my Uncle Israel was employed by a firm of sugar merchants. Being pressed by creditors for debts incurred to assist a friend, he left for America, after a "business trip" to Keidan, which in reality enabled him to take leave of his aged father and mother, who, being aware of another, more personal, source of his unhappiness, tearfully encouraged their favorite son to go and try his fortune in the New World.

It was about a year after this occurence that my father wrote to my mother, this time quite definitely, about sending us *shifskarten*, or steamship tickets, and money as well, so that we could come to the United States. Shortly afterward, Isaac the letter-carrier appeared at my grandfather's house looking more ominous than usual; he produced a bulky envelope with letter and draft (or *onveiszung*), *shifskarten*, and railroad tickets bearing pictures of ships and trains. Thus suddenly a vague, transient hope was transformed into a vivid reality. The receipt of the ultimate letter from America, containing steamship and railroad tickets, money for traveling expenses, and many instructions, was the signal for a bustle of preparations and arrangements, with sad thoughts of the approaching final departure clouding the happy excitement.

But there was too much to do to leave much time for reflection. There were clothes to be bought, and made, for my mother and three children; there was food to be dried and baked and made durable against the prohibitions imposed by the observance of *kashruth* on the journey; and there was so much packing to be done – clothes and bedclothes, huge pillows and featherbeds, and even some cherished copper and brass cooking and other utensils, and ... a samovar! How could people in America get along without a samovar? All these objects were enclosed in various containers: canvas bags, baskets and boxes, and above all, one gigantic wicker-work trunk, with cover and lock and an enormous capacity for holding things, as well as for giving trouble to all those who tried to handle it.

Finally one morning the big *boid*, or van, a conveyance on the order of the old covered wagon, hitched up to two horses, stood laden and waiting in front of my grandfather's house, ready for one of its periodic trips between Keidan and Kovno. Prolonged and sorrowful leavetaking marked the last sad and hectic hours of that morning; my grandmother's usual restraint forsook her and she wept copiously over the heads of her departing grandchildren, whom she surely did not expect ever to see again. Mingled with the resounding farewells from many neighbors and friends as well as members of the family were admonitions, guiding instructions, advice for the journey, and regards to kinsmen in America – all of whom were presumably living in the narrow confines of one street in a single city.

But where was our dear old *zaide* all this while? Was our persistent, ardent, and most devoted grandfather going to let us leave with merely an embrace and a few endearing words? Not he! He insisted upon accompanying us at least part of the way to guard us against mishaps. Was there not an old custom of *beleiten* – accompanying the traveler part of the way to give support to his venture? In his best coat and cap, his boots freshly polished, he took his place beside us in the wagon, as if he too were journeying to America. Our relations and neighbors watched and waved as the crude, creaking homemade tallyho rumbled off – not toward the north, the end of town, in the direction of the railroad station, but toward the south, through the long Smilger Gas and the big square which was the market place, and across the long bridge, the Sabbath-day promenade of the elite, passing through the section colloquially known as "the other side of the water," and on to the open country and the highroads.

The long and tedious trip to Kovno took all day and the greater part of the night. Huddled up against our mother, and surrounded by our bags and bundles, we children – and our grandfather, who sat on a bench in front of us – slept fitfully while the rickety, rattling wagon

lumbered on, every now and then jolting us into full wakefulness. In Kovno, where we had our first glimpse of a larger city, with wider streets and a few tall brick buildings, we had some refreshments and rested for a few hours in a *krechma*, or wayside inn. Then, either in accordance with previous instruction or on newly received advice, we embarked around noon on a sort of excursion and passenger boat that plied the river Neman from Kovno to Yurberik[54], where we were to undertake the perilous adventure of crossing the frontier between Russia and Germany.

It was a pleasant sail on this simple, ferrylike boat, despite the many excited people on board – emigrants like ourselves and other travelers jostling with the pleasure-seeking excursionists, loud-spoken Lithuanian-, Polish-, Russian-, and Yiddish-speaking travelers, producing a babble, if not a Babel, of tongues. Our *zaide* found some consolation at the refreshment counter on the boat, which, he said, served very good beer.

After landing at Yurberik we rested again at a *china*, or tea house. That evening we were to be taken across the frontier, a clandestine affair that required the darkness of the night; arrangements had been made with the traveling agent, who was presumably also the van driver, and had perhaps one or two additional sidelines. Before entering upon the tribulations of crossing the border, we faced the ordeal of parting from our beloved grandfather, and all our tears and loving embraces allayed only slightly the painful wrench of leaving him behind. Zaide, after paying for our lunches and all our immediate needs, insisted upon giving my mother all the money left in his purse, outside of 3 *gulden* (about 45 cents), for fear that we might run short. We could not deter him, and we left not only disconsolate but very much worried as to how he would ever get home from that strange city, a trip requiring at least 10 *rubel*, without money.

We boarded a *diligence*, a more substantial and larger equipage of the covered-wagon type, but built in a curious way with a loose and partly collapsible bottom, the strange purpose of which we were, to our dismay and sorrow, to learn much later. This *boid* was driven by a tall, formidable, red-bearded *fuhrman*, or driver, who held his whip as if it were not only a threat to the horse but a menace as well to the foreign land we were about to enter. His assistant was a beardless and nimble little man who acted as if he was there to offset the gruffness of his boss and to supply politeness to the passengers. His chief task, for a consideration beyond the traveling fare, was to negotiate with the authorities at the frontier, that is, to hand out bribes in both the Russian and the German language – or with no spoken words at all.

I have no notion of what legal status, if any, we possessed as we left our native land. Under the reign of the Tsar – which in this respect anticipated a much later regime – the people, especially the minority groups, had very few rights, certainly not the right of emigration. Once a Russian citizen, always Russian citizen, in the eyes of the law – for better or for worse, usually the latter. Therefore prospective emigrants were subjected to all kinds of regulations and impositions. The easiest way to gain exit from the country was to grease the palms of officialdom. Right now we were dealing with a breed of go-betweens, carriers of human contraband, who made the most of their opportunity – and not only by charging high fees for bringing people over the boundaries from Russia to Germany.

While driving toward the fearsome *grenetz*, or frontier, the team repeatedly broke down. Each time, part of the floor of the carriage would fall out and passengers would be thrown pellmell to all sides and against one another, while satchels, packages, and bags fell through the open spaces of the yawning bottom of the wagon. Frightened and shocked, the unhappy travelers would raise an outcry but the driver would quickly warn them of the danger of making noise in this forbidden zone, He would curse his evil fate, his horses, and his assistant, attributing all the trouble to them, and would send the assistant back along the road

[54] Today, Jurbarkas

to search for the missing pieces of luggage. The passengers too would climb out to grope and search and scour the roadside brush and ravines for their missing belongings. The assistant would return with perhaps one or two objects recovered and report that most of the pieces of luggage were nowhere to be found. The boss driver's scraping of the ground with the butt of his whip in utter darkness would prove equally fruitless.

Stealthy accomplices in the rear, probably driving another wagon or truck, certainly did much better; no doubt they located every parcel or bag that fell out of the wagon. But there was no time for further reproaches and complaints; the driver of our vehicle insisted that we were losing precious time and that we would run into danger if we delayed any longer. So the missing planks would be hurriedly put back – not too firmly however! –in the floor of the wagon, and, all of us weary wanderers having climbed into our seats, the journey would be continued, until the next collapse. For the incident repeated itself three or four times during that night, so that the diabolical inventors of the sliding wagon bottom, base despoilers of the poor and the helpless, could complete their harvest of booty.

When we reached the frontier, the business between our contractor and the officers in charge was conducted in whispers during a few minutes' stop. If the long-talked-of and awesome *grenetz* was something to see or to marvel at, it was too dark for us to observe any sign of it.

Fully worn out and half asleep, we finally arrived at the German city of Tilsit, where, after some time spent in searching and inquiring, we were given shelter in a hostel for emigrants en route provided by a Jewish aid committee. From a window in this lodging house my brother and sister and I watched the imposing maneuvres of a regiment of the Kaiser's soldiers, fascinated by their sparkling regalia and brassy attire, so much more ornate than the accouterments of the Tsar's military we had been used to watching at home. Little did we dream what this display augured for the world in ensuing years.

Throughout the troubled drive to reach German soil, and the ensuing trip on the hard-rattling trains through Germany to the seaport at Bremen, we were anxiously wondering how our dear grandfather, whom we had left behind, practically penniless in a strange city, ever got home to Keidan. We learned only much later of the adventures that befell him. After accompanying us on the eventful trip from Keidan to Yurberik and parting from us in the latter city, our *zaide* went to the *shul*, or synagogue. Following the evening prayer, there was the usual exchange of greetings, the special "*sholom aleichem* (Peace to thee)" welcome extended to one who was obviously a stranger in town. The customary question addressed in such instance – *"Fun vanent kumt a yid?"* ("Where do you hail from?") – led to a lengthy conversation with a man who had relatives in Keidan and therefore invited my grandfather to be his guest for the night. On learning that he wished to pay his respects to a distant kinsman in Taverik[55], a town at close range within the province, his host arranged with a friend who was traveling that way on business to give my grandfather a lift in his *brizke*, or buggy. Arrived in Taverik, my *zaide* rested in a tavern – those three gulden went further than himself – and then walked some distance out of town to the home of his cousin.

This was no ordinary house, nor was the owner an ordinary person. Reb Yoshe Zundel – the rarely used family name eludes my memory – was one of the few remaining Jewish landowning magnates of Lithuania. His *nmanin*, or estate, a family inheritance, covered about a thousand acres, and he lived like a lord of the manor in a grand mansion surrounded by beautiful grounds, including gardens, orchards, and a lake. In the spirit of the ancient patriarch Abraham, who according to legend built his house with many doors so as to make himself more readily accessible to travelers and strangers passing by, there was always open house in this sumptuous domicile.

[55] Tauragė

A special dining room was set up which at all hours served food to visitors and travelers, strangers and friends, and here many itinerant petitioners and beggars came seeking victuals and alms. Before the visit of which I am writing, and long afterward, our *zaide* told us innumerable stories of the fabulous wealth and generous benefactions of Yoshe Zundel and his progenitors.

When my grandfather arrived at the estate and made himself known to a secretary or valet, he was at once provided with a place of rest and offered refreshment. Later Reb Zundel himself appeared. In after days my grandfather would often tell us what an imposing figure he made, with his large head and round, black beard. Sitting tall and erect on a magnificent white mare, a young colt trailing behind, the country squire at once proceeded to greet all waiting visitors, guests, and supplicants, as well as persons who had come on various business errands having to do with his granaries, lumbering, and farm produce. On being told of the arrival of Reb Yakov Herz Sirk from Keidan, Reb Zundel invited my grandfather into his *kabinet*, or private office. The two men talked at length, tracing the long and complicated family relationship between them and exchanging reminiscences. Reb Zundel invited my grandfather to stay ovemight, or a few days, but Zaide said he had to retum as soon as possible. So the next day he departed. Reb Zundel in the course of the farewell asked Reb Yankl Herz, indirectly but quite clearly, if he could help him in any way. My *zaide*, swelling with pride in the re-established relationship with the great man, thanked his host profusely, and with the ancient hauteur of the Sirk family operating in full force, assured him that he was in no need of any assistance. He had merely stopped on his way, he said, after seeing his daughter and grandchildren off to America, to pay his respects to his cousin and to renew a cherished old relationship.

My *zaide* was driven to the town of Taverik, where he arrived very happy and full of self-confidence, though he now had only 20 kopeks in his pocket.

Casting anxiety to the winds, and entrusting his destiny to a benign Providence, my grandfather entered a *krechma* in Taverik, and ordered a glass of beer. At a table nearby sat two men, one quite elderly, the other in early middle age, apparently belonging to the *schlachtzi*, or class of Polish noblemen. They were drinking and talking convivially in the easy-going manner of the most leisurely of the leisure class. My zaide, with his uncanny memory for faces and voices, thought he had recognized a resemblance between the younger man and Count Stanislav Siebetzky, a large landowner with an estate just outside Keidan, whom he knew as he knew so many other notables. He stepped up to their table and, with due apology for the interruption, asked the younger Pole if he was not somehow related to Count Siebetzky of Keidan.

The Pole jumped up from his seat in great excitement. "*Boze moy* (My God!)" he exclaimed, "you know my Uncle Stanislav?" Whereupon my grandfather, invited to join the *schlachtzi* at their table, told of his cordial relations with the great Pan, and imparted to the nephew all he knew about the nobleman's agricultural enterprises and public activities. With the restricted means of communication of those days, uncle and nephew had not been in touch for years, and the first-hand news now conveyed was unexpected and welcome.

After this chance meeting, there was nothing too good for Pan Sirk, the visitor from Keidan. He was wined and dined and given comfortable quarters in the same inn for the night. He was asked to deliver to Count Stanislav not only a letter and personal greetings but also a gift of a handsome imported pipe. And he was forced to accept for himself a little present of 20 rubles – ostensibly to go toward his traveling expenses.

So my zaide got home not only with ease, but with comfort. The delivery of the letter, greetings, and gift certainly enhanced my grandfather's relations with the great Pan. This led to some new business dealings, with increased commissions, and at least for a time, a better outlook for daily subsistence. This I believe should also be credited to America.

Chapter 5

The quaint and rustic town of Keidan, or Keidany, as the Russians pronounced it, was reputed to be of ancient origin, and its residents cherished a legend of the early settlement therein of a sect of Scots Calvinists: The time-stained church on Langer Gas, now occupied by a more recent Polish denomination, was still pointed out as a landmark. Though isolated and provincial, with only an occasional Hebrew or Russian newspaper coming to one of the more elite townsmen, Keidan nevertheless had regular contacts with the great centers of population beyond. Army officers would arrive to supervise our two brigades of Russian cavalry, police inspectors would come to look into the books and the pockets of tax collectors, and merchants like my uncle Israel from Libau would visit us on business matters. Another class of visitors to this compact community of Jews were the *meshulochim*, or messengers, who traveled in the interest of *yeshivoth*, or rabbinical colleges, in distant cities, and *magidim*, or itinerant preachers, whose exhortations and condemnations, delivered in the big *shul*, would stir me to the dephts of my young heart and send me home trembling for my nameless little sins.

Keidaners were a proud race of men. "I am from Keidan", "I am a Keidaner," they were never tired of repeating. The stereotype that ghetto raillery bestowed upon them – as it did upon the natives of every town – poked fun at their village chauvinism: the Keidaner was said to boast so much about his city, to point to himself and pound himself on the chest that it made him round-shouldered, hence *Keidaner heiker* ("Keidan hunchback").

"Stolz vi gants Keidan"(proud as the whole of Keidan), wrote the Yiddish poet Morris Winchevsky, though he himself was not of our town but was, like my father, a native of Yanova, another Lithuanian enclave of old-time piety and learning. The great scholars and men of distinction that our town of Keidan produced added to the pride of the natives. There were rabbis of far-famed wisdom and sanctity. In the secular field of endeavor there was Moshe Leib Lilienblum, precursor of Zionism and Hebrew writer whose autobiographical *Chattot Ne'urim* (Sins of My Youth), published in Vienna in 1876, was a sensation in its day. Isaac Levitan, one of the great landscape painters in Russia, was also born in Keidan (1860), and while his townsmen could not understand why and what he was painting in far-off St. Petersburg, they were nevertheless ready to claim credit for his work. Lilienblum too had removed himself from our midst, settling in distant Odessa, but his growing fame as a leader of his people continued to shed luster on his native village.

Among the relatives who would on rare occasions come to enliven the sameness of long days, none was more welcome than Yoshe Leiser, a thin, gnomelike little man with a sharp-pointed beard. He was a distant cousin of my *zaide*, from a place near Vilkomir. He came every spring to purchase seed for the truck gardeners of his district. Genial to a fault, bubbling over with good humor, he had such a fund of amusing experiences to relate that we were all delighted to see him and eager to hear him talk. Yoshe Leiser, with a bundle of canvas bags of all sizes dangling from his back as part of his very light luggage, was our herald of spring: when he came to purchase his seeds we knew that brighter days were ahead. His little canvas bags would be empty at first, but after he had made the rounds of our local gardeners and planters they would be bulging with seeds of all kinds. He would carry his load over his shoulder on his journey home – looking for all the world like the burden-bearing messenger of song and story. We children would cling to him every hour of his stay. In proffered compensation for several days of lodging and food he would seek to make himself useful around the house. He would no sooner enter and dispose of the customary greetings than he would pick up two wooden buckets and go down to the river for fresh water. Then he would assist with heating the samovar, bring more wood for the oven fire from the shed, and carry out other chores. For an extra bed a sheaf of fresh straw would be spread out on the floor of the main room. As a special indulgence I would be allowed to share his sleeping quarters. I was always wanting to have a heart-to-heart talk with him, to tell him my perplexities and ask for advice.

There was a time when neither my *rebbe* (the principal of my Hebrew school), my *zaide*, nor I was satisfied with the progress I was making, a certain element of uncertainty having crept into the instruction because I was regarded, and indeed thought of myself, as a future settler in America, where everything was to be so different. The harsh admonitions of a *magid* would throw me into panic as I remembered with qualms of conscience some deviation from observance of the Sabbath law. Intense religious emotions induced either by the burning words of the *magid* or by the solemn and sonorous reading from the Prophets in *cheder* in the fading light of the late afternoon – Isaiah, perhaps, storming against the black sheep in, Israel – would create a mood of repentance and contrition. This made the thought of joining my father in godless America a horrifying prospect to contemplate. With such a troubled mind I would look forward to Yoshe Leiser's arrival, eager to unburden myself to him. I recall how on several nights when I slept beside him I began to unfold my doubts and misgivings. But every time this happened I fell asleep before I finished my story,

Next day there would be long *cheder* hours, household chores and errands to do, and the diversions of the street, and the alternating emotions of religious ecstasy and repentance would vanish – until somehow a new *magid* had come to town. Then all by myself – without asking any questions – I would wander off either to the *Beth Hamidrash* or to the Grosse Shul (both located at the *shulhoyf*, or synagogue center of the town); for an hour or more I would revel in the emotion stirred up by the *magid*. I was putty in the hands of any one of these masters of admonition of intense moralizing, described in Hebrew as *musar*. I did not know then that this type of exhortation was the core of an ethical movement (with a distinctive literature of its own) that had taken its place in history in the middle of the nineteenth century under the leadership of a great scholar named Israel Salanter. Of course I could not follow the *magid* in the theological dialectics or sophistic arguments known as *pilpul*, but there was enough reproof and remonstrance to make me wince and to fill me with terror at the prospect of the hereafter he conjured up. His fierce words would sink deep into my being, and I would resolve that never again on the Sabbath would I bite into a plum or a cherry hanging from a branch or pick a blade of sour grass with my teeth (favorite ways of attempting to evade the sin of picking fruit on the Day of Rest). Never again would I commit such transgressions. But after a time the memory of the indictment would wear off and I would return to my evil days, until either a new *magid* or the Day of Atonement arrived.

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Worlds Gone By (Keidan at the end of the 19th century) *Keidan Yizkor book, pp 65-70*

Dr. Hyman J. Epstein

Originally published in 1930 by the Keidaner Assn. of New York. Translated by Meyer Dwass

Keidan was not just another Lithuanian *shtetl;* it was a city, with an important lineage. Proud was the Jew who, when asked "Where do you hail from?" could answer, "I'm a Keidaner!" Truthfully, the writer of this memoir is not a "100-percent" Keidaner. Even though my papa and grandpa and all his family lived and died in Keidan, I myself was fated to be born not in Keidan but in Ragole [Ariogala]. Still it pleased me greatly when they called me "Chaimke the Keidaner" at my yeshiva in Ragole. Those childhood years which I spent in Keidan made an everlasting impression on me, so that Keidan remains as a sweet dream in my memory.

Controversies in Keidan

Not that everyone in Keidan lived in peace and harmony. On the contrary, Keidan was full of religious disputes -- perhaps more than any other town in Lithuania. Members of the *shul* and the *kloyz*[56] were constantly at war with each other. Each had its own rabbi, and each tried to manage community affairs in its own fashion. Before Pesach Keidan had two separate charity drives. And nobody would let a baker of the other faction bake matzos for him until his oven had been purified and certified kosher by a neutral party.

One Saturday the *kloyzner* rabbi, Reb Berl Mezik of blessed memory, announced that Jews were absolutely forbidden to carry anything on Sabbath,[57] while the *shulner* rabbi said otherwise. Comical it was to see young boys from the *shul* carrying *tcholents*[58] for the *kloyz* families. Only in the cemetery did unity prevail among Keidaner Jews, under the undisputed control of old Itsche Moishe Yudes, the *shamash* of the burial society, better described as the Tsar of the dead.

The *cheder* and the barracks

There were two important institutions in town that left their marks on the Jewish children and youth of Keidan - the *cheder* [primary school] and the Russian military barracks. The *cheder*, where small children were confined from eight in the morning until nine at night throughout the year, deadened all our hopes and ambitions. Except for the bright hope of Friday, when we were released early, we were treated worse than prisoners. Our teacher lived in poverty and took out all his frustrations on us. Complaining about him did no good, because our parents believed strongly in strict discipline and always sided with the teacher. So naturally we could hardly wait for the coming of our beloved Friday afternoon; the moment it arrived, we ran off to the Russian barracks, where the two artillery batteries, the Fifth and Sixth, used to be stationed.

Grinfeld, the colonel of the Fifth battery, and Goleshchapov, commander of the Sixth, drilled their soldiers and we were the spectators. All the youth of Keidan – including young women and marriageable bachelors –would spend the day there as well, admiring the heroic soldiers, who took pains to look good in front of our youth. We knew almost all of them by name, and when the cruel Colonel Goleshchapov slapped platoon-leader Bakayev, the solder cried like a child – not so much from the pain of the blow as from being shamed in front of the Jewish girls and youths.

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[56] *Kloyz* was the term for a small synagogue (*shul*) or study house.

[57] Orthodox communities often symbolically surround an area with wire, within which food or other necessities may be carried on the Sabbath. The principle is called *eruv* and its exact rules of implementation are often controversial.

[58] A traditional Sabbath dish of meat, potatoes and beans, prepared on Friday and often slow-cooked overnight in a neighborhood baker's oven, to be eaten after Saturday services.

So it was no wonder that our main pastime was playing soldiers. And when we were immersed in our game, nothing else mattered to us. Cheder, home, food - who thought of such things? What mattered was showing how high a barrier we could jump over or performing other feats. These developed in us a spirit of heroism and daring. We hated Goleshchapov for his cruelty, but we forgave him his sins every Saturday when his band performed outdoors in the middle of *Langer Gas* [Long Street], something he apparently did just for us. We rarely had the chance to hear music, except when the Keidan Jewish band led a bride and groom to the wedding canopy in the synagogue yard, or when Count Totleben's visits to Keidan were celebrated in the castle courtyard with music and fireworks. On those occasions we young people would stand outside his palace's windows and balconies, taking great pleasure in the festivities for "our Totleben."

The draft

Russian militarism was not always a source of pleasure. Our town's saddest times came right after the holidays, when the Russians conducted their annual draft. The eligible young Jewish recruits had for weeks been appealing to the town's elders for help. Year in, year out, they would use the same tactic – delaying the call-up. After hours of negotiation they would arrive at an agreement and begin reading out the names.

The mood was awful during draft days. First they would examine the non-Jews, and everybody would breathe easier when that was over, because the same hoodlums who used to run around town starting fights with anyone they met were completely transformed after the draft. Those who had been called up would walk around glumly with their heads down; those who had been rejected would get out of Keidan as fast as they could and run home.

Then came the Jewish draft. All day nearly the whole town would be lined up on *Langer Gas* by Mote Lipitz's house to hear the results. Every few minutes a Jewish youth would stick his head out a window and run a hand across his throat, signaling he had been slaughtered, and his assembled friends and relatives would begin to wail in the street below. The Keidan police force, which consisted of two Jews – Hershel Bul and Motke the constable – never interfered with the noisy, crying crowd. Who could blame them? Hearts were full of bitterness! But then there would be a comic scene, when a young man ran out of the building and down the street half naked, holding his trousers in his hand. Rejected! There was a kind of superstition among us, that once the authorities had pronounced the words "not fit" a youth had to immediately run wherever his eyes took him, before the board could change its mind.

Shabbat promenades over the bridge

Only young people would promenade. Of course, the grownups would stroll to and from the synagogue, and on Rosh Hashana they would all go to *tashlikh*.[59] But the young would set out right after eating, or after Saturday supper, to walk on the bridge over the Neviazhe. It was not a long bridge and could be crossed back and forth many times, giving young men and women many chances to meet. Of course, boys and girls would not walk together; in the first place this would be shameful, and in the second place, pranksters would make terrible fun of those who tried. They would call out a phrase from the Bible that implied the couple must be drunk, and the laughter would echo the length of the bridge. So the boys strolled in groups of two or three; so did the girls. Here come the F. sisters, both dressed alike. Everyone stares. Meeting them, we greet them in Russian – *"Zdravstvuytye!"* We move on, tipping our hats to Sh.'s beautiful daughter. To stop and chat with any of these ladies is naturally out of the question; people would talk.

[59]An annual prayer ceremony in which Jews figuratively cast their sins into flowing water.

The yearly floods

In Keidan you could count on the river Neviazhe to flood every Passover. When the ice broke and the floes were forced ahead, the water rose higher and higher. Before one knew it, the river flowed over its edges and the entire marketplace was flooded. Some tried to cross with a hastily made raft, some abandoned everything and escaped further up into the town. The stubborn ones stayed on in their homes as long as they could, until they could no longer open their doors. At that point, several young men would have to rescue the schoolteacher Noah Reuvens and his wife Rashe through a window. Naturally everyone worried, and tried to guess how high the water would reach this year. The same worries occupied those living across the river, but it all lasted a day or two at most, and then everything returned to normal.

The Keidan fire brigade

Fires were a common occurrence in Keidan, and with every conflagration the whole town was at risk of destruction. No wonder homeowners trembled when the fire "alarm" went off: The "alarm" that consisted of everyone who had God in his heart and a voice to shout with running through the streets shouting "Help! Fire!" Everyone ran to the site of the blaze: Some ran with pails, some with ropes and axes or whatever else was at hand. Everyone was on a rescue mission. Usually the wooden hut, where the fire had started, would burn to the ground, but a great effort was made to protect the wood and straw roofs of the neighboring houses. Water was not always available, so sand and mud, which always were in plentiful supply, were used instead.

After one of the larger fires, in which Smilga Street was destroyed all the way to the small synagogue, the young people in Keidan decided to organize a fire brigade and volunteers from all social classes signed up. A firefighter's uniform consisted of a type of soldier's helmet with a shiny visor, and the brigade on parade was like a proud, victorious army. Naturally, the wealthy people were the officers who would give the orders to pour barrels of water on the fire. Everyone had a fixed job and there was a ready routine.

So what did God do? There were no fires! The brigade members just walked around, mournful and impatient. One day the commanders came up with a plan. The brigade would build a hut of old boards and straw, far out of town, on the other side of the river, and one day right after evening prayers and after everyone's supper, the hut would be ignited. As soon as the fire scout spotted the fire, he would blow the signal on his trumpet and the whole brigade would run to extinguish the fire. This would put the brigade's ability to the test.

Of course, the whole plan was to be secret. On the scheduled day the leaders of the brigade walked around very pleased with themselves. They could already imagine the dark sky lit with flames, while the townspeople ran about frightened and amazed at the speed with which the fire-fighters extinguished the great fire!

Unfortunately, as the saying goes, "Man plans while God laughs." Well before afternoon prayers some pranksters torched the hut. And when the trumpeter was told to sound his signal. he would not believe there was a fire and he ran to the bridge to convince himself. Only then did he blow his trumpet. By the time the firemen gathered up their gear and reached the fire, it was all over. All they could do was to pump water on the smoldering embers and ashes. That was a dismal night for the Keidan fire brigade.

The holidays and Simchat Torah

Keidan was a gloomy place for most of the year, the burdens of life resting heavy on everyone's bent shoulders. But as soon as the holidays neared, the clouds disappeared and our faces brightened. Our eternal sadness gave way to pride and joy as we all made our way to the synagogue.

We savored each holiday, but *Simchat Torah*[60] was a special joy. The whole town was happy, everyone's spirits rose, and young and old alike felt ready to dance till they dropped, exhausted with joy. It was like a miracle. Constantly sad faces now beamed, ordinarily tearful eyes were now shining as everyone celebrated our holy joy in the Torah.

Near the synagogue, by the river, where the Smilga joins the Neviazhe, barrels of pitch are piled up ready for use. Young pranksters have gathered all the kindling they could get their hands on. As it grows dark the barrels are ignited and their light illuminates the whole city. Everyone watches with great pleasure, shouting and dancing, until the fire burns itself out. Then the crowd heads to the synagogue for the ceremonial Torah procession.

The synagogue is packed. Women and girls join the men in their downstairs prayer area – something not allowed at any other time. Reb Leyzer the *shamash* instructs as his assistant places candles in the giant chandelier, which has been lowered on a long rope over the center platform. When the candles are all lit Leyzer orders young boys in the balcony to pull up the chandelier. Then comes a yearly ritual as someone in the congregation shouts: "The blessed flock!" To which the children bleat in unison: "Meh-h-h." And again: "The blessed flock!" and the children's response: "Meh-h-h."

The prayers are led, not by the usual cantor, Reb Dovid Feinzinger, but rather by a layman who begins the evening service using the *Kol Nidre* melody from Yom Kippur eve. Remarkably, the same melody that tears at the heartstrings during Kol Nidre, brings no sadness on this night; rather it seems a source of fun, bringing a wave of joy.

Next, portions of the *"ata her'eta*[61]" prayer are distributed. The town's leading citizens, after celebrating throughout the day of *Shmini Atzeret* with the gabbai or the rabbi, stand in their places on the synagogue's east side, half intoxicated. Each performs his portion in his own style, and the congregation repeats each one, their voices raised loudly.

There seems to be a small democratic wind in the air. Even the big shots by the eastern wall seem less pompous than usual. And when Reb David Yitzhak, pretending to be drunk, begins singing a hasidic melody, helped by the youngsters, interrupting the "*ata her'eta*," none of the elders rebukes him. On the contrary, the shamash loudly calls him up to the podium to read a passage, proclaiming that "our teacher, Reb David Yitzhak, son of Reb Asher-Leib, honors us with the passage from '*ata horeita,'* beginning "in David's name." This brings Reb David-Yitzhak suddenly back to his senses, and he begins to sing in a hearty voice: "In the name of David, your servant, do not keep us from the Messiah!" The congregation feels that the holiday belongs to everyone.

As the *ata horeita* prayer ends the Torah procession begins, led by the men of property, followed by the youths holding scrolls of the Torah and Prophets, and finally by little kids holding paper flags and carrots on sticks, with lit candles attached. Everyone takes part. The parade circles the *bima* seven times with everyone, including the women, stretching to kiss the Torahs as they passed by. Recently married young men, still living with their fathers-in-law, playfully trick young matrons into planting a kiss on their hands instead of on their Torahs. This does not anger the young women, who merely lower their eyes in embarrassment.

When the prayers are over, people don't go straight home, but wish each other a good holiday. Groups of revelers proceed to visit each other's homes, singing and dancing en route, receiving drinks and refreshments at each stop from the woman of the house and giving her good wishes in return, then taking her husband off to the next stop, until late into the night, attempting to hold on to the holiday spirit as long as they could.

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[60]The celebration renewing the yearly cycle of Torah readings.

[61] "It has been shown to you" – the opening words of a traditional prayer said on Simchat Torah.

Doctors and *feldshers*

Keidan had only two doctors: The village's Dr. Yevtekhovsky, and the apostate Dr. Levit, also known as Layne, who lived on German Street. Yevtekhovsky was the younger of the two and also the busier. He was engaged by the government to examine military draftees. As a result he had many patients who were not really sick, but wanted to establish ties so as to be able to "shmear" him when their sons and brothers became eligible for conscription. Yevtekhovsky was not at all bad for a *goy*, which is to say he was willing to take a bribe.

Doctor Layne was not as popular; therefore, besides doctoring, he had a sideline, which brought in close to nearly all the householders of Keidan: He made small loans, taking pawned goods or notes of good value, and requiring weekly payments at high interest rates. The whole town detested him as much as they depended on him. Moreover, he had family connections: His daughter had married the police captain. Thus it became especially important to stay on his good side. At Passover his debtors filled his house with presents of matzos and honey wine, meanwhile wishing in their hearts that the apostate should get sick.

While the two "real" doctors were not of much use to Keidan, God provided good Jewish *feldshers*[62] to meet the town's medical needs. Neither of the two official doctors was worth a finger compared with Reb Velve, Reb Gavriel or Reb Hirsh Lieb. Despite their lack of official medical certification, they were esteemed as experts with abilities far beyond those of the gentile doctors. Moreover, it should be noted that doctors were not called when women gave birth: For that service Keidaners turned to Mina the midwife, whose husband Leib helped out and also sold lumber. With such experts on hand, Keidaners felt secure in their health and lives.

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I could go on endlessly with many stories from the various layers of Keidan society of those days -- the wagon drivers and coachmen who played a dominant role in the town and in the synagogue; the big merchants and the small market peddlers, with their whisk brooms hanging under their coats; the cloth merchants and the small dealers in notions. Their lives, their aspirations, their grand ideas and their petty accomplishments; the Keidan intelligentsia, the graduates of the community trade school and their educator Ptashkin. However, most of this was not peculiar to Keidan, but was part of the life of most towns in Lithuania.

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[62]Unlicensed medical practitioners, folk doctors.

Keidan in 1905 *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 71-72*

B.Y. Bialostotzky

First published in "Lita" pp 1214-1217.
Translated by Chaim Charutz

I spent some time in Keidan in 1905, when I was about 12 years old. My father took me with him as he traveled as a *maggid* [preacher] among the towns of Lithuania. He wanted to teach me *Gemara* by himself, which is why he took me with him. Thus I saw many well-known towns.

In every town, my father had to report to either the *gabbai* [congregational administrator] or the *shamash* [synagogue caretaker] regarding his sermon in the synagogue. I remember that my father always preferred to go to the *shamash* rather than to the *gabbai*. The *gabbais* were frequently angry and haughty, while most of the *shamosim* were kind-hearted and friendly Jews.

I remember that the *gabbai* of the large beit-hamidrash [study house] in Keidan said to my father: "It would be better if you moved on. At the moment, we have here the preacher of Shirvint [Širvintai] and the preacher of Mozyr [Mazyr]. What do we need a third *maggid* for?"

But the *shamash* of the beit-hamidrash, on the other hand, said to my father: "Our Jews will hear you. Those other two will move on soon."

Keidaners loved to hear a preacher. The local tradesmen, in particular, embraced preachers. In other towns of Lithuania as well, people loved to hear the preacher. *Maggids* fulfilled an important function in Lithuania. Their influence on the public was not less than that of various Hasidic "wonder workers" in the Ukraine, Poland and Galicia. But instead of bringing miracles, the preacher would bring ethical teachings and lessons that sank deep into the heart. Avraham Reisen, our great author from Koidanov [Dzerzhinsk] in Minsk province, described such preachers lovingly in his stories.

From Lithuania came the classic preacher, who practiced in Vilna at the time of the *Gaon*. He was known as the Dubner *maggid*. From Lithuania also came the remarkable Kelmer *maggid*, who described hell in his sermons no less vividly than did the Italian poet Dante in his "Inferno." The preacher of Grodno, Elyakum Getzel, also practiced in Lithuania. He was a remarkable sermonizer who had many students follow and preach after him. My father also saw himself as a student of Reb Elyakum Getzel. Similarly, two famous preachers – the *maggid* of Shirvint and the *maggid* of Mozyr – also strongly influenced the public. Some of the preachers displayed a bit of what we would today call popular acting or theatricality. The preacher would arrive with melodies, little songs, poetic pictures and parables. There were preachers who also used humor in their sermons. They had profound words for more educated Jews and they knew the secret of simple words for the simple masses and for Jewish women.

Some of the preachers also included messages of social justice in their sermons. The great *maggid* Elyakum Getzel used to establish societies, mainly of workers, and preach simple sermons to them separately, so that they would better understand. He would also study *Mishna* and *Chumash* with them, and tell them wonderful parables . . . From his workers' societies arose many Jewish cultural and labor activists. Other preachers in Lithuania behaved in a similar manner. Their ethics were not just ethics of the individual, taken out of a book, but frequently contained social ideas.

I heard the *Maggid* of Shirvint, and I still see him as if alive today, a broad-shouldered Jew with a wide, bony face and a high forehead. His preacher's chant was a sort of enthusiastic challenge to God. There was something revolutionary about him. He made claims against the public, but he also pronounced claims against the creator of the world. Why was the suffering of the Jews so great? Naturally, he soon became reconciled with God and returned to attacking the public...

Two or three years after I was in Keidan, I found the same maggid in a tragic state, in Shirvint. He became fond of alcohol and would drink to intoxication. This situation brought him to a sort of insanity. I saw him lying in a side-room of the synagogue in Shirvint. From time to time, the old preacher in him would stir, one of his past sermons would spark in his brain, and he would run to the pulpit. He would start preaching in a singssong voice, not caring if anyone was in the synagogue to hear him or not. There, on a mattress in the small side chamber of the Shirvint synagogue, he gave up his soul.

The second preacher whom I met in Keidan sermonized melodically. He was more musical and undeniably theatrical. He wore a cape, and his fair hair and blue eyes cast a mischievous light around him. He was closer to the modern type of preacher, who appeared because of Zionism – a "lecturer." Zvi Hirsch Maslianski, who lived and worked for a long time in America until his death, was, it seems to me, the father and the classic example of all these orators. Masliansky's influence in "the old country" was mainly in "Greater Lithuania" – in Kovno, Vilna, Grodno, Minsk and Suwalk provinces.

Let us now return to my recollections of Keidan. The Shirvinter and the Mozyrer went their way, and my father preached his sermon. After the sermon, an old tailor took him for a cup of tea. He lived next door to the synagogue. In his apartment, we found two young tailors, his apprentices. Later, a few other tailors arrived. It was as if the tailors of Keidan had a historical pact among themselves.

A few days later, I heard from the mouth of the old tailor himself about a unique historical event. This was the true story about the rebellion and uprising of Keidan's tailors which took place at the beginning of the 19th century, in 1815 or thereabouts.[63]

The story goes that once, the leading citizens of Keidan grew furious with a tailor because he dared to come to synagogue wearing a velvet *yarmulke*. At that time only a rich man, a person of property, was permitted to wear such a thing. The tailor was fined. This incident angered the tradesmen of Keidan, and a revolt broke out. There were bitter arguments, and even fistfights. The incident came to the attention of the count, and later even reached Petersburg.

This was no minor matter: The tailors and handworkers of Keidan were not about to let anyone spit in their cereal – no way! Eventually, the rich folk were forced to submit, and the tailors of Keidan always recalled with pride the uprising of their great-great-grandfathers, so that they could come to synagogue with velvet *yarmulkes* on their heads and silk coats on their bodies, just like the haughty men of property.

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[63] See in the book "*Lita*": Vishnitzer, Dr. Mark, "*Jewish Craft and Artisan Guilds in Lithuania*."

Between Two World Wars
בין שתי מלחמות העולם

Sports and Youth Organizations
ארגוני ספורט ונוער

Education and Culture
השכלה ותרבות

Religious Life
חיי דת

Economics and Social Life
כלכלה וחיי חברה

Sports and Youth Organizations
ארגוני ספורט ונוער

Sport in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 75-78*
Chaim Landsberg

Translated by Chaim Charutz

In the early 1920's, a branch of "Maccabi" was set up in Keidan. The impetus for this organization came from a committee of Zionist activists from various political parties, such as the General Zionists, *Poalei Zion*, Socialist Zionists, and ordinary Jews who were worried about the future of their youth.

Among the members of the committee were: Yisraelov, Chaim Blumberg, Chana Landsberg, and the late Hirshel Golombik. Their aim was not just to organize the "Maccabi," but primarily to prevent the youth from joining the anti-Zionist parties, the Communists and Yiddishists.

I remember that Hirshel Golombik was given the job of starting up the operation. He was chosen because his home - the Golombik house - was open to all ages (from 10 to 30). This large family included Hirshel, Faivel, Shalom, Yerachmiel and Kalman, who were very active and energetic, and each of them had many friends. One evening, when a few friends gathered at this house, Hirshel Golombik suggested they set up a Maccabi sports club. More than 20 people signed up on the spot. This group was given the job of signing up additional members and, within a few weeks, they had about 80 members, male and female.

A hall was rented, and at the founding assembly a new committee was elected. This committee included Hirshel Golombik, Faivel Golombik, Shmuel Landsberg, Shimon Shibolet (Zang), B. M. Shibolet (Zang), and others.

The first activities did not involve sports per se. People used to come to the hall for meetings and evening entertainment. Some played chess, checkers and dominoes, while others came to read a newspaper or just for friendly conversation.

At a later stage, a team of instructors in various sports was set up. Assistance in this matter was given by the central Maccabi office for Lithuania. The sports which they began to organize were: soccer – three teams; gymnastics – a men's team and a women's team; gymnastics on parallel bars – two teams; light athletics – javelin and discus throwing, long jump and high jump.

Soccer

The first soccer team consisted of: H. Dameretzky, S. Shibolet, S. Landsberg, V. Eidelman, Y. Sholomovich, P. Golombik, Sochin, B. Shibolet, Chatzke (I forget his surname), S. Golombik., H. Lipchik, Y. Rochin and others.

The second team included Yaakov Dameretzky, Y. Steinbek, Ch. Bein and others. (By the way, the son of Chaim Bein is Alan Bean, the [American] astronaut, who took part in the Apollo program and was one of those who walked on the moon).[64]

[64] This is actually not the case. The astronaut Alan Bean is from a non-Jewish family in Texas. - ed.

The third team was the youth team, and the following were players: L. Sirkin (A. Sarig who, many years later, became president of the Israeli Football Association), Y. Golombik, Chaim Landsberg, Baruch Bobilski, David Bobilski, L. Donsky, H. Gelfer, Lipchik, Y. Dameretzky.

Eventually, the teams began dwindling. Many team members emigrated to South Africa and America, some went to Eretz-Israel, joined "Hechalutz", went to kibbutz training farms, and joined the army. In the end, one team remained with a few reserve members. This team was fortified by members of the third team: Leib Donsky, the Bobilski brothers, Chaim Landsberg, Hirshel Gelfer and Lipchik.

Many competitions were held in Keidan, among them: against the Yanova (Jonava) team, the Vilkomir (Ukmerge) team, the Ponevezh (Panevėžys) team, the Shavli (Šiauliai) team, the Academy team from Dotnuva, the garrison team (the second artillery batallion) and the Shaulist team (L.P.L.S.)

In one of these games against the army garrison encamped in Keidan, V. Eidelman broke his leg and suffered from his injury till his last days.

Gymnastics

The Women's gymnastics team was led by Yocheved Weitzer. The other participants were: Zelda (today Sheila Lipchik), Golda Lieba Bukshnevski, Chaya Yaffe, Lieba Magdalenski, Reiza Zaltzburg, Sarah Pokroyski, Riva Rom, Rachel Morgenstern, Riva Frank (Landsberg), the Shapira sisters, Sarah Linde, Gita Golinski and others.

The participants in the men's team were: David and Baruch Bobilski, Y. Golombik, Chaim Landsberg, L. Donski, Lipchik and others.

The first light athletic meets were not auspicious for the Keidan Maccabi competitors. However, the Vilkomir Maccabi team was once invited (footballers and athletes). Much was learned from them, but we did not reach high levels of achievement. Nevertheless, this meeting stimulated contestants who started coming to practice sessions, and the situation started improving.

Sports exhibitions were held a few times. These included free gymnastics for men and for women. The outfit problem for the men was solved by white shirts and exercise shorts, but how could we bring the women onto the stage in shorts? How would the audience react when the girls exposed their legs before the viewers? In particular, what would their parents say? We finally found a compromise: The women wore three-quarter-length trousers (below the knee), held by rubber bands.

Parallel bar gymnastics (for men): this sport included a number of compulsory exercises and one optional exercise.

Pyramids: The team performed two- and three-story pyramids. To tell the truth, we succeeded here and the performances were beautiful and complete. I remember that we once performed a pyramid in which I was sitting on the shoulders of Yudel Steinbek – quite a comfortable spot – while on my shoulders stood Kalman Golombik.

During the period of Maccabi's florescence, the management decided to do something to show off the team. The manager of the local Maccabi in Kovno was Gold, who had played on the famous "Hakoach" Vienna team. They staged a game between the first and second teams, and Gold was invited to be the referee. Public interest was beyond all expectations, and many came to see the wonderful Gold. This exhibition raised members' morale and improved the financial situation. Until then, the income from entrance tickets was very low, and expenses were covered by low membership fees.

That evening, there was a party in the Maccabi hall, with Gold participating. Gold was very impressed with A. Steinbeck who was rather plump, and played for the second team as a defender. Gold called him "the 100-kilo fullback" and said that this was rare in soccer.

An unforgettable experience

I once had an unforgettable experience in a game in which I did not take part, because of an injury. A few friends suggested that I should come and see a soccer game from the stands. They said that, since I was always on the field, I had no opportunity to see the game from the stands, and it was indeed an experience to watch the action from there. Yisraelov used to run (of course, outside the field itself) with the attack of the forwards, and would imitate the movements of the players. Later, he would make signs of disappointment when the opposing team's goalkeeper stopped a ball kicked towards his goal-posts. When I asked him whether he didn't get tired from the game, he answered that he "lived" the game and was very excited by it.

No less than he was my elder brother, Yaakov Landsberg, who used to run with me, (I ran on the field, and he off it). Although my second brother, Shmuel Landsberg, also played with us on the field, he was more enthusiastic about me, apparently because I was the little brother.

During the same period, an excellent footballer from Riga, named Brosterman (brother-in-law of S. Goldblatt), joined us. He put a bit of life into our team. This footballer was married with two pleasant children. The Jews of the town could not understand how a married man, and the father of children, could run around kicking a ball. This was a topic of conversation even at the synagogue where he used to pray on Sabbath.

When the team was left without financial backing, we exploited the fact that most of the players were members of the volunteer fire brigade, and the brigade took the team under its wings. In 1927 and 1928, we played a number of times with outside teams and local non-Jewish teams. The fire brigade bought us new uniforms (each player had to buy his own football boots) and gave us the use of a field near the railway track.

This football team actually consisted of members from all political streams, because the fire brigade was apolitical. There was even a gentile in this team. His name was Riniker.

"Hapoel"

After the Maccabi movement broke up, L. Sirkin joined the "Hapoel" organization of Lithuania and turned to us, asking to set up a local branch of Hapoel.

Among the organizers whom Sirkin (Sarig) addressed were: Pesach Shlapoberski, Chaim Landsberg, Shaul Lubinski, the late L. Donski, the late D. Goldberg, and others.

The organizers started recruiting members who had some connection to the Eretz Israel labor movement. In their recruitment of members to Hapoel, they encountered difficulties. Most of the youth were already members of various youth movements, such as Hashomer Hatzair, Hechalutz or Betar, whose common goal was the preparation of their members for *aliya* to the Land of Israel.

We refused to admit members of the Communist Party youth movement (which was active in the underground), fearing to be identified with them and refused a license for our branch by the authorities. The Yiddishist youth organization prohibited its members from joining Hapoel. Finally Hechalutz Hatzair came to our assistance by encouraging its members to join our ranks. After much effort, we managed to recruit more than 30 members to Hapoel.

We decided to collect membership dues. The dues were set in proportion to each member's financial ability. It appeared that the available funds did not cover expenses. We turned to the heads of the Socialist Zionist branch, the teachers Mr. Liss and Chana Landsberg, both of blessed memory, for help and advice. We received generous assistance, and a hall was rented to serve as our clubhouse, at their expense and on their responsibility. The hall was in the house in which Chava Shlapoberski lived. Current expenses for club maintenance were covered by us from membership dues.

We organized ourselves when we received the club-house. The sports equipment came as a "legacy" from Maccabi. A ping-pong table, benches, chairs and tables were made by the members after working hours by themselves without payment (the materials were cheap), and the clubhouse began to take shape. About a month later, representatives from Hapoel headquarters arrived for a visit and praised us for our success in building such a clubhouse in such a short time.

At the start of activities, we played ping-pong and set up a reading room. The reading matter was brought by the members and, since the club was open in the evenings, they used to bring the daily newspapers with them.

When it was decided to set up a library, we announced a "Book Day for Hapoel". The members went out in pairs to supporters' homes to receive contributions for the library. The response was better than expected and on the first day, we collected about 300 books. We received contributions of this size all the time. The books were lent without payment to club members and to members of the "Hechalutz" training group who were in the town at the time.

Slowly but surely, we began to organize the various sports, such as track and field and free gymnastics – all without the use of outside trainers. Each of us donated his experience and ability. We used the playing fields with the kind permission of the fire brigade.

As the number of members grew steadily, after six months we could already finance ourselves and we could give up the assistance of the Socialist Zionists. The branch crystalized and took form. Order and discipline were exemplary, and the committee was subject to the General Assembly. Assemblies were generally organized within the framework of walking tours outside the town, which also helped in social consolidation.

Branch members frequently attended Hapoel assemblies, in which there were public exhibitions by the best Hapoel sportsmen. Members used to return from these assemblies with new ideas which improved the sporting level of the branch.

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Memories of Hashomer Hatzair Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 79-83*

Abba Jonah Goldin (Golani), kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Miriam Erez

In 1923, I joined the Scouts movement that had been founded by Lord Baden-Powell, and whose activity in those days centered around games and summer camps. The Scouts attracted most of the school youth. In 1924, the Scout branch became a *Hashomer Hatzair* branch, after which its activities took on an entirely different character. Back then, the Hashomer Hatzair tied its fate to Zionism and of course to the Land of Israel, emphasizing Jewish education in the Diaspora to aid the Zionist movement and to build the Land.

The Jewish National Fund was one of the Zionist movement's tools, and our Hashomer branch was one of those that devoted itself to raising money for the JNF in all possible ways. For instance, we went around emptying blue JNF boxes; on Rosh Hashana Eve we organized an "internal mail" service to send New Year's greetings; on Yom Kippur Eve we'd sit in the synagogues with collection bowls; and at various festive events we'd show up and collect money for JNF. We also earned money baking matzo, and donated our earnings to the JNF.

In addition, we took an active part in the work of the "Eretz Israel Workers' Fund," and *Hapoel* [the sports association], and initiated one other very important activity, for which we won recognition and commendation from everyone in town. It was done by the senior members of the branch, who "adopted" the children of Keidan's orphanage. Nearly around the clock, a branch member, boy or girl, was with the kids of the orphanage: We took them on hikes, sang with them, held discussions, and led various scouting activities, trying with infinite devotion and love to make their lives more pleasant and alleviate their suffering.

Meanwhile, branch life became more and more tied to the Land of Israel. Instead of scout songs, we began singing songs of Eretz Israel that we learned from the emissaries, who used to come from there and impart not only the songs, but the entire experience and the warmth of the Land of Israel.

Students became more and more attracted to the Hashomer movement. Our branch had many members and an organized clubhouse, and we participated in all town events, wearing our Hashomer uniforms. In summer we'd march through the town on our way to camp, wearing our shirts, carrying our gear, singing and drumming. We were much loved by the Jews of Keidan.

Next door to the branch was the "Aid Committee," which included many of our parents and teachers, headed by Pesach Weitzer-Chitin and our teachers Chana Landsberg, Liss, and Poritz, of blessed memory. The committee represented the branch to the authorities and to the Jewish institutions in town.

Over time, the branch decided that it wasn't enough to collect money for the JNF; Hashomer Hatzair needed to actually take part in *aliya* and in building the Land. It was decided that all senior members of the branch must start "self-realization," that is, agricultural training to prepare for *aliya* to Eretz Israel in order to create Hashomer Hatzair *kibbutzim* there. In 1925, agricultural training groups began forming around Keidan, in which the senior members took an active role. On Saturdays we would leave town to visit them.

It should be mentioned that the first Zionist pioneer training farm in Lithuania was created in Pelédnagiai, four kilometers south of Keidan, with the help of Shabtiel Deitsch of Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal) of Lithuania. In time the farm moved to the area of Kybartai-Vilkaviškis in southwest Lithuania, and was called *Kibbush*. There, hundreds of pioneers from Lithuania prepared themselves for *aliya*.

Meanwhile, the Keidan Hashomer grew, and we needed money to keep up the meeting space and for other expenses. Because many Jews in Keidan grew cucumbers and needed nighttime guards for their cucumber plots during harvest, we persuaded some of them to hire us. We guarded in pairs: one pair worked until midnight, then another pair took over from

midnight until morning. In addition to earning the income, it was important to us (the seniors) to get used to nighttime guarding and prepare our growing bodies for the challenges of *aliya*.

Despite the cucumber farmers' misgivings, we managed to prove to them that we could do successfully what until then no Jewish youth had dared, i.e., guard fields at night in a hostile, Christian environment.

An important ritual for the seniors in that period was the "shared breakfast" in the bosom of nature, outside of town. The initiator and spirit behind this event was Reuven Blumson-Shemi. We seniors would gather at dawn, each having brought his own food. We would take cooking utensils, cross the bridge over the Smilga and gather in a little grove, where we'd cook and eat our breakfast together — the early budding of shared life in the kibbutz. And of course the meal was accompanied by songs from the Land of Israel.

Volodka runs away from home

At this point I'll tell about one of the seniors from the Hashomer branch who went to agricultural training. It was the summer of 1930. I was in the group that was due to go for training. In our group was a young man named Volodka Funt, who had moved to Keidan with his father and two sisters. The Funts were quite assimilated, and distanced from Judaism and Zionism. Volodka's father was a dentist, and all his friends were Christian police officers and public servants. Volodka showed up at the branch and told us that he'd been a member of Hashomer Hatzair in Poland and wanted to continue with Hashomer in Keidan. He was devoted to Hashomer Hatzair and active in the branch, besides which he was nice-looking and could play the harmonica well. When it came time for him go for training, he told his father, who was dead-set against it and threatened to prevent us all from going. Volodka told us this, and asked for our help.

At that time, Tzemach Berger-Harari, of blessed memory, was the head of our branch. We began hearing from other branches in Lithuania that other parents had opposed their children going for training, but in some cases the children were determined and simply ran away to the training farms. We asked ourselves, "Why not help Volodka run away from home?" We asked him if that was what he wanted to do, and he said he did. To ensure a successful escape, we asked him to stop visiting the branch, to create the impression at home that he had abandoned the training idea.

Then Tzemach and I met to plan Volodka's escape down to the last detail. One thing we knew for certain: There was no room for failure here. Everything had to be planned meticulously, secretly, and precisely. First, we found a training group far from Keidan, in the western port city of Memel (Klaipeda), that agreed to accept Volodka. Second, we began following the Funt family's daily routine and movements in and out of the house, so we could figure out how to get Volodka out of town and on the train to Memel. After a few evenings of this, we made an escape plan:

1. We set a time for the escape on Saturday night, when Volodka's father would go play cards with his police friends.

2. We found out that the train to Memel would pass through Keidan on the way to Dotnuva, 10 kilometers northwest of Keidan, at 2 a.m., then continue on to Memel.

3. The train from Dotnuva to Keidan, on which Tzemach and I planned to return home, would pass through Dotnuva at 4 a.m.

We planned to execute the escape right after Volodka's father and sisters were to leave the house on Saturday night, walk to Dotnuva, put Volodka on the train to Memel, and return to Keidan that same night without exposing ourselves and without anyone knowing we'd been gone. We instructed Volodka to secretly pack a knapsack with some clothing, and I'd bring him food for the journey.

The Funts lived on Keidan's main street, opposite Tzemach's cinema. Saturday night at the agreed time, I waited with Tzemach next to the cinema. After Volodka's father and sisters left

the house, Volodka put his clothes into the knapsack, threw it to me out the side window of his house and calmly came downstairs. When I'd caught the knapsack, I ducked into a lane that led to Smilga Street, where Volodka and Tzemach met me a short while later. And that's where our first glitch occurred: Volodka had a dog, and when Volodka left the house, his dog followed him. We began hurrying through the lane, the dog at our heels; when we reached Smilga Street, we decided to get rid of the dog. Tzemach stayed in the lane and began throwing rocks at the dog, while Volodka and I continued along Smilga Street and the military courtyard on our way to Dotnuva. After he'd managed to get rid of the dog, Tzemach caught up with us at the bridge. The three of us kept walking on the main road to the railway station, taking care not to be seen by anyone. We crossed the bridge one by one, and a few minutes later we were on our way to Dotnuva. We began to run, to put more distance between ourselves and Keidan, fearing that someone would notice our absence and come looking for us.

We alternately ran and rested for four kilometers, at which point we decided to stop for a break to regain our strength. It was pitch dark, and while it was the first time in our lives that we'd been out in the forest at night, our success in smuggling Volodka out of town without anyone's knowledge encouraged us. And so we ran, three youngsters with a knapsack along the dark deserted road, helping one of us to realize his dream of going for agriculture training and making aliya to the Land of Israel.

Back at the Funt house, though, things were different, as we found out later. When Volodka had packed, he'd been in a hurry, and in his haste he'd left his wardrobe door open and a pair of socks on the floor. One of his sisters, who had come back home for something, sensed that something was amiss, and immediately told her father, who was playing cards with the town officer. At father Funt's request, the officer took a coach and a few mounted policemen and came after us.

Just then, as we were resting at the side of the road and getting ready to continue, we heard horses' hooves approaching. We immediately got off the road, ducked into a grove, and lay down in the weeds. The coach and a few mounted policemen stopped not far away. The stillness of the night enabled us to clearly hear what they were saying. We immediately identified father Funt's voice, as well as that of the police officer. After they explored the area, we heard the officer say to father Funt, "They couldn't have gotten this far. Let's go to the train." We breathed a sigh of relief.

When they'd put some distance between us, we got up and left the grove. Volodka said, "We're lucky my father didn't take the dog along. He would have sensed me right away." We again began running toward Dotnuva. We knew they were coming after us, and we knew we had to be extra cautious in order not to be discovered. An hour later, we reached Dotnuva. We took separate routes through town and met up again near the train station, about an hour before the train was due. While Volodka and I hid nearby, Tzemach bought a ticket to Memel for Volodka; when he returned, I went and bought two tickets to Keidan for Tzemach and myself. We climbed onto the platform separately, me holding the knapsack.

When the train arrived, I handed the knapsack to Volodka. We said our goodbyes quietly, Volodka boarded the train, and with that the story of the training escape ended — for Volodka. But not for Tzemach and me. We returned to Keidan on the next train, just as it began to get light. We decided to scan the train station platform carefully through the coach window before alighting. As the train slowed down and came to a stop, we "saw black": On the platform stood father Funt with the dog, policemen and the station detective. We immediately crouched down so they wouldn't see us, then got out on the other side, where fortunately a freight train was parked. We crawled underneath it and out into the park, through which we reached town without being seen. At the outskirts of town we parted, and each went home.

The entire way home, it ate at me: Does my family already know about Volodka's running away? Entering my home, I met my mother of blessed memory, busy at the bakery. From her ordinary greeting, I realized immediately that she knew nothing.

Our house was something of a center for the Hashomer Hatzair branch and for Hechalutz Hatzair, in which my brother Shmulik, of blessed memory, was active. Because of this, my mother was used to me frequently sleeping over at others' homes while visiting training groups in nearby towns, or busy with preparations for summer camp. So she never suspected anything was up.

At that time, I worked at the Movshovitz & Kagan printing shop, and I had to get to work on time. Just to be on the safe side, so as not to arouse any suspicion, I asked my mother to wake me up in an hour, and I made it to work on time. By the time I arrived, everyone there already knew about Volodka's running away, although they didn't suspect that I was involved.

One thing that bothered us about Volodka's running away was the reaction in the "Jewish street." How would our parents and our supporters react? How would our young people react? Nothing like this had ever happened before in Keidan. Tzemach and I worried it could damage the branch.

To our surprise, the Jewish street welcomed the operation openly; after all, we'd shown the assimilated Jew, Funt, what Zionist youth are, particularly as no one knew exactly how it was done or who was behind it. Even the police were never able to figure it out.

Yet that afternoon, when I got home, my mother took me to the side room and whispered, "It was you — Tzemke and you were planning it all these evenings. You had to specifically mess with this assimilated Jew: The entire police force is on his side. They may arrest you." I smiled and replied, "No one will ever know who did it and how. There's no need to speak of it." Mother turned to me with her beautiful smile and indeed, we never spoke of it again.

Meanwhile, a letter from Volodka arrived. He told his family he was healthy and doing well, and asked his father to forgive him and not to blame anyone. He explained he had been compelled to take this step, and told them the decision had been his alone. With time the incident was forgotten, and even Volodka's father reconciled himself to it. Meanwhile, the action raised the Hashomer branch's prestige and credibility with the youth.

In 1931, I also went for training, and in 1932, I left for Eretz Israel and joined a kibbutz of the Lithuanian Hashomer Hatzair that began in Petach Tikva, and today is Beit Zera [in the Jordan Valley south of the Kinneret Lake]. In 1935, my parents also came to Eretz Israel. Our house in Keidan, which was taken over by my brother-in-law David Prusak, remained a center of the Keidan Hashomer branch. David's son Yosef Prusak, of blessed memory, was the branch leader until that terrible day the Jews of Keidan were murdered in cold blood by the Lithuanians. On that day, when the chief rabbi of the town, Sh. Feinsilber of blessed memory, was walking at the head of his community, my brother-in-law David, who had served as the rabbi's secretary throughout his term, was by his side. In their lives and in death, they were inseparable.

I want to add a few words here: Our scouting and Hashomer Hatzair training, as well as our agricultural training, ended up being very valuable, testimony to which are the dozens of Keidan branch members spread throughout Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim all over Israel. When I recall my town of Keidan today, the Jewish youth there and the now-destroyed community, I see before my eyes three Jewish teenagers racing through the night to fulfill their dreams of going to the Land of Israel.

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The Founding and Early Years of Beitar in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 84-87*

Gershon Shlapobersky

Translated by Miriam Erez

It's difficult to recall and write down events that took place 40 or more years ago. If only my friend, Yehuda Geben, may he rest in peace, who died in the prime of his life in Nahariya were alive, together we could reconstruct all the events of that period. But unfortunately that's not possible so I'll try my best to go it alone. Before I tell about Beitar's founding in Keidan, let me tell about events a few years prior.

We were a group of a dozen young people; nearly all of us attended the Hebrew high school, and we sought to organize a group that would be different from Hashomer Hatzair — which in our eyes was too "girly" — and from Maccabi, which was strictly sports. We wanted something masculine, connected to the Land of Israel, our ancestral home and to Jewish heroes who sacrificed their lives to liberate our land from foreign oppressors. We decided to call our association "Bar-Kochba" after Shimon Bar-Kochba, a great rebel and leader of the Jewish revolt against the Roman occupiers.

We met a few times a week in a small room at the Gebens' home and read aloud stories of Jewish fighters' heroism, as well as stories from Hebrew literature. We'd debate the content of what we read and together sing Hebrew songs. We'd go on nature hikes outside of town, and occasionally go sailing in the evenings on the Neviazhe [Nevėžis].
Over time we saw that we couldn't sustain our activities alone, so we turned to our teacher Rosenzweig for help. When he heard what we wanted, he asked us, "Why do you want to have an organization that has no connection to anyone outside your own town? Look: There's a worldwide youth organization called Gordonia. Affiliate with them, and I'll help you." At a group meeting we accepted his advice, disbanded our association and formed a Gordonia group. We were given a Jewish community house to use in the evenings, where we met, and also established a library with books, which each of us donated as much as he could. After we organized, we decided to accept new members, females as well as males. We went on like that for a while, but eventually we saw that it wasn't what we were looking for. After long debates and disagreements, the majority of us split off and left Gordonia.

For me personally, and especially for my friend Yehuda Geben, this move caused Rosenzweig to give us worse grades, so much so that we were compelled to go to the school principal Rishman, and ask him to intervene. In a subsequent hearing, the conflict over our grades was settled.

Meanwhile, in Jewish communities all over Lithuania, Beitar clubs were beginning to organize. We read about it in the newspapers and understood that here, finally, was what we had been looking for. We immediately called Beitar headquarters in Kovno [Kaunas] and asked them to send us reading materials, as well as one of their members to help us get started. At the end of 1928 we opened an official branch of Lithuanian Beitar in Keidan. I went to Kovno, where the movement secretariat resided at the home of Yehezkel Dilyon, of blessed memory. The organization was managed from his house. After receiving guidance from him, we began running our branch.

While it was hard to run the branch on our own without outside funding, by charging dues we managed to balance our budget. At first we were a single group of boys. We began to work with increased energy and decided to accept more members, including girls. We rented a room from the Wolpert family for our meeting place, and their son Yakov Wolpert (may the Lord avenge his blood), helped us with our cultural programs. After putting out some feelers, we managed to persuade Aryeh Frank (may the Lord avenge his blood) to lead the branch. From then onward, we had regular activities. We ran the branch under strict discipline, including a dress code and Beitar uniforms.

In the summer we went to camp for two weeks, which we set up on the riverbank outside of town, in the heart of nature. Every day was packed with activities: Lectures, marching in

formation and at night around the campfire, songs and stories. And after lights out, guard duty. It was a meaningful experience for us all.

From time to time an emissary from headquarters would come through, which was an exciting event for us, as we'd hear reports of Beitar's progress in Lithuania and around the world. The first time we participated in a government parade in 1929, we were given a place of honor, and we marched proudly past the reviewing stand. Dressed in our spiffy uniforms and with our precision marching, we impressed the onlookers. Over time, we became an institution in Keidan: We participated in Jewish National Fund activities such as fundraising and distributing blue boxes and educational materials.

We also decided to approach the children of Yiddishists, who were distant from Zionism, convincing them to join Beitar. As our membership increased and we outgrew our meeting space, we took an apartment by the Skongale, beside the river. Now we had plenty of room, but in winter there was the problem of heating. Despite the fact that every member brought wood for heating, it wasn't enough. At that time, an abandoned house stood on the Shlapoberskys' property. On dark nights, we snuck into it and removed beams from its walls, dragged them to our club, and cut them into pieces. Thus the problem of heating was solved for the entire winter.

Yet even this apartment wasn't big enough, so we rented an entire house on the other side of the river. Naturally we had a problem paying the rent, but this too was overcome: At Chanukah we held a "latke ball". If you haven't seen our girl members peeling potatoes and frying latkes, you haven't known joy. Even the grownups attended that evening, and it was a big success. We also celebrated another event in the club: Our commander got married, and we threw a splendid and joyous party.

The political climate in Lithuania was very tense at that time. It was after a military coup, and a permanent state of emergency existed. Every meeting and activity required a permit from the military governor. I was on good terms with them, so I was able to obtain permits without too much trouble. The Beitar branch also served as a Revisionist Zionist center, so we would bring lecturers to speak on the Zionist question. Before the Zionist Congress met, we would distribute shekels. We also managed to bring Beitar's Lithuania delegate [to the 17th Zionist Congress in 1930], Mordechai Katz, which was a big event citywide.

One night, we were walking along the main street after a meeting at our headquarters, and we saw a Jewish communist throwing forbidden literature over the fence of the army barracks, which stood along this street. A plainclothes police officer, whom we didn't know, came and arrested us as if we were the ones who had thrown the forbidden pamphlets. The police searched us and of course found nothing. Still, they phoned the detectives' commander and announced proudly that they'd caught a group of Jewish communists. But the officer's elevated mood changed the moment the commander walked in the door, saw us and chastised him: "Who are these small fish you caught?" After many apologies and asking our pardon, he ordered our release.

One day in 1930, we received the exciting news that the head of World Beitar, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, was going to stop at the Keidan train station on his way from Riga to Kovno. We decided to hold a welcome reception for him at the station. With great enthusiasm we resumed practicing our marching for the big day. A few hours before Jabotinsky's train was due to arrive, we stood in excited formation. When the train arrived and our commander boarded, and we saw the much-admired Jabotinsky through the train windows, our joy knew no bounds. That moment left an unforgettable impression on us all.

Shortly afterward, I attended the Beitar Lithuania conference as Keidan's delegate, with Jabotinsky in attendance. When I got home, I delivered a report on the conference to our headquarters.

In the summer of 1930, I was called to go for agricultural training. I handed my duties as executive and treasurer over to Yehuda Geben, and went to the area around Alyta [Alytus], about 60 kilometers south of Kovno, from where I corresponded with Yehuda, who kept me up to date on all the issues. A few months later I came back and resumed all my duties. After

much correspondence and requests on our part, a new leader was finally sent to us from headquarters, a young man named Gernstein. With his help, we successfully put the branch on the right track. We were quite proud of the fact that we'd gotten as far as we did without any funding or external help.

In the summer of 1931, I went for training again, this time in the Memel area, and when I returned, the branch had changed beyond recognition: The younger members had "grown up" and become serious Beitarniks, giving me much personal satisfaction.

At the beginning of 1932, I received the heartening news from Beitar Lithuania headquarters that out of the five [emigration] certificates that the Zionist Federation had allotted to Beitar Lithuania, I had been fortunate to receive one. I was quite pleased and proud to be the first from Beitar Keidan to emigrate to Eretz-Israel.

In the summer of 1932, the central headquarters organized a regional conference in Vilkomir [Ukmergė]. Nearly our entire branch went, and the journey was loads of fun. It was our first time taking the small train from Yanova [Jonava] to Vilkomir, and everyone got rowdy on the way. At the conference, my *aliya* was announced. A representative from headquarters congratulated me and bid me a heartfelt farewell. Before my departure, the branch threw a farewell party in my honor. It was hard to leave after all the hard work I'd invested in establishing and expanding Keidan's Beitar branch.

In September 1932 I came to Eretz-Israel and was sent to a Beitar work brigade in Hadera. Once again I corresponded with Yehuda and wrote him descriptions of the Land of Israel and of life in the brigade. And of course he wrote me about the goings-on in the branch.

At the beginning of 1933, the first female Beitar member from Keidan arrived in Eretz-Israel, Chava Yaffe, who is now my wife. She brought greetings and news of what was happening in Keidan. A few years later my friend Yehuda Geben arrived, from whom I'd already been informed about the expansion of our Beitar branch and about the establishment of *Hatzohar*[65] and *Brit Hachayal*[66] associations in Keidan, and of all sorts of people who had joined us.

To my sorrow, our joy didn't last long. By the time the Russians invaded Lithuania, a few Beitar members from Keidan had managed to go abroad – to the U.S. and South Africa, but unfortunately they were only a few: The majority were murdered by the Lithuanians and the Nazis together with all Keidan's Jews. A few were left alive in Russia, and only a few of those managed to make it to the Land of Israel.

Let this memoir be a written memorial to all from Beitar in Keidan who were not finally privileged to live in the State of Israel, the object of their dreams, and were cut down while still young by the Lithuanian and Nazi murderers. May God avenge their blood.

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[65] Association of Revisionist Zionists

[66] Association of Jewish military veterans, active in the 1930s, allied with the Revisionists.

'Hechalutz Hatzair' and *'Hapoel'* in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book p 88.*

Pesach Shlapobersky

Translated by Miriam Erez

My memories of *Hechalutz Hatzair* in Keidan begin in 1926. In those days, while there were Scouts and Beitar branches, both of which attracted children and school youth, the working youth had no place for meetings or for after-work and holiday leisure. A few of us therefore got together and decided to form a local branch of *Hechalutz Hatzair*, and began to hold activities immediately. I was one of the active members.

We held our meetings in one of the rooms at the Talmud Torah, which had long before become a *Tarbut* school. Naturally we got permission from the administration to use the school as a meeting place. Over time we began receiving materials from the *Hechalutz Hatzair* center in Kovno, the capital, and I even attended a few conferences there. The center took care of lodging delegates in Kovno's urban kibbutz, which was on the way to Aleksot (Aleksotas) Hill.

In 1928, I decided to go to Kovno to study mechanics, so of course I ceased my activity in the *Hechalutz Hatzair* Keidan branch, but when I returned in 1929, with the help of some marginal kids who had meanwhile grown older, I established a branch of *Hapoel* in Keidan. As best I can recall, we got a permit from the district government to conduct sports activities.

For our meeting place, we renovated the Jewish community house, which was dilapidated, and we formed a soccer team with *Hapoel* sport uniforms. We organized games against Hapoel teams from other towns and against non-Jewish teams.

I continued with organization and other work in *Hapoel* until September 1931, when I was drafted into the Lithuanian army. I was stationed in Vilkomir [Ukmergė], where I also tried to open a branch of *Hapoel*, but I was told not to, as the authorities would find out, and I was after all in the army.

I was discharged in April 1933, and returned to Keidan. While my memories of *Hapoel* activity thereafter are not clear, I do recall that that year, an urban training kibbutz was established in Keidan, and I helped establish it as best I could. But by August of that year, I had made *aliya* to Eretz-Israel.

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Photos from Keidan Yizkor book following p 88.



Male Maccabi gymnasts



Female Maccabi gymnasts



Maccabi footballers playing a visiting team.



"Yizreel" regiment of "Hashomer Hatzair," 1939.



"Hashomer Hatzair" cell, 1928.



Scouts on a march



Children of "OZE," the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population, 1932.



Teachers and children of the "Yavne" Hebrew School



Celebrating the 10th anniversary of "OZE," February 27, 1937



First-level class in the Hebrew progymnasium, 1924



Students in the evening class, 1926



A group of firefighters.
Seated in front row, centre: The martyred Tzadok Shlapobersky.



Firefighters



Firefighters' football team during a match vs the Jonava Maccabi team.



At the "Kibush" training farm, Peledнagiai, 1924



Chalutzim (pioneers) at Pelednagiai,1925



"Chalutz" union, 1932



The "Tarbut" Hebrew primary school



The Keidan Hebrew secondary school, 1921-1922



The main street in Ariogala.



Banquet marking the first graduates of the 6-year course in the Keidan Hebrew primary school, June 13, 1937.



The main street in Shat (Šėta).



"Hapoel" football team.



"Beitar" football team



Beitar members about to leave for "hachshara" training to prepare them for aliyah, 1930.

Education and Culture
השכלה ותרבות

Schools in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 89-91*
Zippora Kaplan

Translated by Chaim Charutz

The Jewish community in Lithuania was generally poor before World War I, but it was rich in spiritual matters and in the love of Torah. The vast majority of the Jewish people in Lithuania lived financially oppressed lives, but they all sent their children to *cheder*, and they used part of their meager food to help sustain yeshiva students.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw an awakening in education and youth activism. There were three major educational directions in the Jewish world at that time: The traditional *cheder* with translations into Yiddish; Yiddish schools of the Bundist movement (this was the time of vigorous youth rebellion and the peak period of the Bund); and the Hebrew-immersion schools.

At the outbreak of the world war in 1914, the government of Tsarist Russia banished most Lithuanian Jews to internal parts of Russia, fearing they would become enemy spies. At the end of the war, Jews started returning to their homes. Lithuania, which had gained independence with the support of world Jewry, gave the Lithuanian Jews a high degree of cultural autonomy. A special minister – a Jew, Dr. Soloveitchik – was even appointed to handle Jewish affairs.

During the period of banishment to Russia's vast interior, horizons widened and eyes were opened for the Jews of the Lithuanian towns. This was the period of the Balfour Declaration. As is usual, war aroused patriotism, and a strong Zionist movement arose in Lithuania. Hebrew schools were set up, under the guidance of Tarbut, encouraged by the Jewish ministry and recognized by the government. Not many teachers knew Hebrew, and many Hebrew speakers suddenly became teachers at that time. Supplementary courses for teachers were set up in the fields of general knowledge, psychology and pedagogy. The government also demanded that teachers learn Lithuanian and be examined to receive teaching certificates.

The Tarbut center in Kovno devoted itself to creating of a corps of certified teachers, with the aid of summer courses, to overcome the shortage of teachers in the schools. The courses were overseen by experienced teachers and graduates of the Hebrew gymnasiums who wanted to be active in the field of education.

The Tarbut school

In the summer of 1923, the parents' committee of the Tarbut school in Keidan approached Dr. Schwabe, principal of the Hebrew gymnasium in Kovno, asking him to recommend one of the gymnasium graduates to teach in their school. Dr. Schwabe recommended me, Fania Vinitzky, as a teacher. I had just finished the Hebrew gymnasium. This is how I got to Keidan, city of my dreams, from which I went to the land of our fathers.

My aunt, Beile-Neche and uncle Chaim Blumberg lived in Keidan. My uncle Chaim's formal name was Yedidiya, and he was, as his name hinted, a friend to all. My uncle Chaim was active in many civic affairs, but the thing closest to his heart was the *Tarbut* school. His children studied there, among them his son Gutman, who was in the first group.

This school was well managed by the talented teacher Chana Landsberg, who was dedicated in heart and soul. The Tarbut school was on a main street called *Langer Gas* [Long Street], which was later called Gedimino Street. The school occupied the second floor of a brick

building. The rooms were high, large and whitewashed, without any decoration. The school did not have a courtyard at all. The very large rooms, larger than needed, were difficult to heat on cold winter days The government did send wood for heating, but very little. On winter's coldest days the children sat with their coats on. It was difficult for them to write with frozen fingers.

Chaim Blumberg, Yisraelov and Mislovaty – the head of the Young Zionists' movement in the city – bore the burden of the many troubles that befell the Tarbut school. Some of the school's teachers received government salaries, which were very low.

A parents' committee was elected for the school. Its functions included supplementing the teachers' salaries and paying the unofficial teachers, as well as meeting the school's other needs such as additional firewood, so that classes could be held more or less normally even on very cold winter days.

Apart from the Tarbut school, there was also a Yiddishist school. In addition to regular studies, children there also absorbed the Bund's leftist ideology and a hatred of the petit bourgeoisie. They mocked the Hebrew language, calling the children of the Tarbut School "*alte sheymes*" [old scraps of paper]. These insults inflamed quarrels among the children.

The reformed *cheder*

The third school, apart from the few *cheders* run by rabbis, was the orthodox school, a sort of reformed *cheder*, where studies were in Hebrew and also included general studies. Its tendency was not Zionist and the students devoted themselves mostly to studying Bible and Gemara. In the synagogue yard there stood a special building which was intended to be the school. It included a long corridor with classrooms on both sides as well as a teachers' room. It also included a large courtyard, which aroused intense envy from the students and teachers of the Tarbut school.

This school's management was incompetent and there were internal intrigues. The parents' committee decided to look for a principal. They received a recommendation for the teacher Kaplan, who was a well-known teacher and devoted educator. When Kaplan came to manage the school he introduced new methods. He had a different approach to discipline and education. With the help and support of the teacher Blushtein, (the Bible teacher, a wonderful man and a dedicated teacher), the school changed its character, which had previously been close to that of a *cheder*, and became a good primary school.

As principal, Kaplan got the teachers and students to participate in the creation of the Keidan Hebrew primary school. The hours dedicated to Hebrew teaching were increased. Nature and geography studies were added as well as gymnastics, while the large courtyard was used for free games, in which teachers took part with enthusiastic students. During his second year he teamed up with the teacher Landsberg, and they merged their two schools into one both physically and spiritually. The teachers taught subjects in which they had specialized, moving from one school to the other.

In the school on the synagogue grounds, we also found a place to set up a nature corner. A human skeleton was brought in. By chance I found and brought in a real human skull. We started drying flowers and plants, and displayed them in albums. After some effort, we received geographical maps from the government, and the children started to learn about lands and seas. We found that tracing a voyage to the Land of Israel over land and sea was especially pleasant for all. These activities all fanned enthusiasm among both teachers and students.

For those of us in Israel, where children speak Hebrew as a mother tongue from childhood, free education is a given and sport is an integral part of the system, it is difficult to understand that in this period, it was a wonder to speak Hebrew during lessons and during some breaks. We had to look for Hebrew terms before each lesson and make lists of these terms in order to dictate them to the children. They had to learn to love words such as "flower" and "tree" from these lists, since there were no Hebrew textbooks. We told them that the Jews were actually tilling the soil in Eretz-Israel, demonstrating this with JNF pictures. We wanted to give

them a feeling of pride and a love of their ancient homeland.

In 1925, before the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the teacher Kaplan left us and made *aliya*. He passed the management of the school to the teacher Liss, who had just returned from Eretz-Israel. Kaplan's *aliya* strongly influenced the students – he was a living example and a source of admiration. The town's Young Zionist movement also picked up extra momentum. I myself, the teacher Vinitzky, made *aliya* in September 1925. For a few years we hoped that Chana Landsberg would join us and make *aliya*. It was difficult for her to part from the school, which was like her child, or from her home and her mother and family, which remained in Keidan.

Almost 50 years have passed since I left the school I so loved. I have forgotten many things through the years, but the events that happened in Keidan and the joy of creativity, which I felt in my work at the school there, as well as the public and cultural work that we did there I have not forgotten. So my town has remained engraved on my heart as the "city of my dreams."

Many Keidaners made *aliya* and were saved from the Holocaust, which was a bitter fate for the Jews of Lithuania. To a large extent their *aliya* could be credited to the spirit of love, which the primary school planted in its students, as well as its continuation – the Hebrew progymnasium (under the management of the teacher Magentza). And even for those who survived in Russia, despite their many years in exile, its spark did not die out.

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Memories of the Progymnasium in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book p 92-3*

Dr. Mordechai Sochen (Minneapolis)

Translated by Chaim Charutz

The progymnasium [junior high school] was established in 1921. During its first year, about 40 students, aged approximately 13, enrolled. They all studied in one classroom. The teacher and first principal was Mr. Israel Magentza. He was a young man, a bachelor, charismatic, with vast knowledge of the humanities generally and Jewish studies in particular. But most of all he was an "emissary" par excellence, devoted to his work, with a national-pioneering disposition, who knew what was ahead of him and who overcame all difficulties.

In his first year, he stayed in the house of a German pastor at the edge of the city. This house was furnished as a school for teaching his community. The pastor, by the way, was also the German teacher. The students suffered from him, because he beat them with his hand, which had a heavy ring on one of its fingers. At one time, the students rebelled and refused to return to the class after the break.

The subjects we studied in the first year were Hebrew language and literature, Jewish and general history, geography and the Bible. Most of the subjects did not have textbooks. The teacher used to prepare stencils in his own handwriting and the students used to come to his room to help him make copies on the hectograph.

During its second year, the progymnasium moved to the town center, to a two-story building with classrooms and a staff room. Mathematics, nature studies and Lithuanian were added as subjects. For mathematics we used the book of Sh. Kapit, hand-written and printed by offset. The history text was written by Luboshitsky. For literature we used an anthology (by K. Shulman?) and the Hebrew syntax of N. Lidsky.

The first teacher, Mr. Magentza, had an enormous influence on his students both within and outside the classroom. I remember that he took the students to Pelednagiai, about seven miles from the city, where there was a training farm for pioneers preparing for *aliya* to Eretz-Israel. You can imagine the impression this visit made on young students. Here they saw the Zionist idea illustrated before their eyes, hinting at the path of their future fulfillment. He helped the students to set up a Hebrew library. They ordered books from the "Dvir" and "Shtibel" publishing houses, and they satisfied their intellectual appetites with a selection of general literature translated into Hebrew, and of modern Hebrew literature. They organized literary "trials". One of these, on Samuel and Saul, was publicly presented and angered the orthodox because of the non-traditional interpretations expressed by some of the students.

Most of the students belonged to the Hebrew Scouts, which later became affiliated with *Hashomer Hatzair*. Undoubtedly, that group's attitude regarding Zionist pioneering indirectly influenced the decision of the management to change the non-nationalistic Scouts federation to one of a clear Zionist orientation.

When Magentza left Keidan, the school decided to bring in a principal with a formal doctoral degree. The aim was to legitimize the institution in the eyes of the government, granting it the right to issue high-school matriculation certificates. Because it was difficult to find such a man in Lithuania, they brought one from Germany. His name was Rabbi Dr. Meir Kashinsky, a religious Jew who had difficulty speaking Hebrew, and taught history in German. Apart from him, we had a humanities teacher called Klachko, and a Mr. Bloch to teach science. We also had a good teacher of Lithuanian, the wife of an army officer who lived in the area. Attention was also paid to physical training. The gymnastics teacher used to march us through the city streets to the gymnastics hall, where we would perform various complicated physical exercises.

After Dr. Kashinsky came Dr. Ritshman. He was an elderly man, pleasant and easygoing with everyone. In his days, the school was managed smoothly and peacefully. One of his projects involved establishing a nature museum. He used to bring snakes, butterflies, etc., and display them within a glass cupboard.

After four years in the school, those students who wished to continue their studies would transfer to the Hebrew gymnasium in Kovno. I remember that we had a group of about ten students who sat for examinations in 1925 at "Schwabe's gymnasium" in Kovno, and nearly all of them were accepted into the sixth level.

Those were good days for the Jews of Lithuania. There was an atmosphere of freedom, and we were able to develop education and the community autonomously according to the spirit and tradition of our people. However, this period did not last long. The Lithuanians undermined this freedom with all sorts of restrictions. Many of the nation's youth foresaw that the golden age in Lithuania would not last, and they made *aliya* to Eretz-Israel. Many of our school's students are living now in Israel, on kibbutzim and in towns. It's a pity that so many stayed behind and were trapped in the Holocaust.

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The Library and the Drama Club *Keidan Yizkor Book p 94*

Haviva Rochin-Carmeli, Kibbutz Kfar Masaryk

Translated by Chaim Charutz

I have locked inside me a few memories of a number of projects and classes within the cultural life of my town, Keidan.

The first is the town library, from which most of the inhabitants absorbed knowledge and wisdom – adults, youth, and above all the senior members of the various youth movements.

This corner of culture was situated in a miserable, ramshackle building – I don't remember the name of the street – but I do remember that it was in the middle of all the town's butcher shops. The atmosphere in the library was always pleasant, relaxed and full of comradely meetings of those searching for spiritual food – on the life and folklore of our people, written by the best of our authors from across the Diaspora. I was nearly ready to make *aliya*, together with my friends. We searched there and found routes to Israeli literature, and it was as if we had started to realize our future lives. I remember the works of Barash, Kabak, Smilansky, Ever-Hadani, which led us to the tangible reality of our land at that time. We identified with all their heroes, filled with self-sacrifice for our people and the homeland. They brought us nearer, to no small extent, to the goal. It is, therefore, difficult to forget this blessed project, which did so well to nourish and to equip its many visitors with spiritual culture.

* * *

The drama ensemble was another cultural pearl. It was made up of all the senior youth circles. The ensemble mainly presented its performances in Yiddish.

To a large degree, the ensemble enriched cultural life. It also contributed to those who could only learn in this way the experiences and knowledge of the lives of our people spread out all over the world. I remember the intensive preparations when the time came to present plays on the stage. The fire brigade hall, which served as the center for these performances, was full of people, old and young. They came to see the works of Sholem Aleichem, Goldfaden, Sholem Asch and Dinezon. Days of laughter and tears were thoroughly mixed together. People lived for days and weeks in the shadow of these experiences. There were those among them who were illiterate, and only by this way could they get to these works of folklore by our great authors.

Many of the members of this ensemble started emigrating early to various parts of the world. However, new young faces were always being added, and things kept going on. When I made *aliya*, I left the ensemble still in full bloom; but when the worst of the oppressors of all generations came, everything sank and became silent, together with all our slain and slaughtered brethren.

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Theater in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor book, p 95*

Julius Lee

Originally published in "The Keidaner" bulletin of the Keidaner Assn. of New York, No. 19, 1936. Translated by Andrew Cassel.

Of all the old memories that are engraved on my mind I want to share one episode. This was in that era when I and my friends were emerging from our boyish years, growing weary of adventures such as fighting wars between one side of town and the other, wrestling with our enemies while swimming underwater in the Skongale, entertainments with the young misses near Totleben's castle and the Borer Woods and so forth. Feeling that we had outgrown these former pastimes, we decided to turn our hands to the field of drama.

Since Keidan had never seen much beyond Biblical pageants such as "The Sacrifice of Isaac" or "The Selling of Joseph," we elected to perform one of Goldfaden's plays, namely *"Kabtsenzon un Hungerman"* ("Pauper's Son and Hungry Man"). The ensemble consisted of me, Motke Rabinovich, Tzemke Pick, Yankele Feinberg and Tzemke Romm. My teacher (now Dr. Pick) helped us with the sets, music and stage-managing. We used Wolfowitz's lumber warehouse as a theater.

The evening of the performance arrived. The house was so packed people could scarcely breathe. Dovid's orchestra launched into an overture, *"Ata Khanan"*. The curtain (made from a bed sheet) went up. We performed the first act, which met with plenty of enthusiastic applause. We began the second, which featured Rabinovich and me in the leading roles. I, dressed as a lady, and he as a tramp, together had to seduce and swindle a rich man. We were singing a duet when suddenly – crash! – an uproar and a scream. A tumult in the crowd, which nearly caused catastrophe as a spectator fell from the upper boards. The crowd could barely be contained. But it soon emerged that the interruption had been caused by Rabinovich's little sister. Seeing her brother made up as a tramp, with old clothes and a dirty face, had so upset her that she began making a spectacle of herself.

When things calmed down we continued the play, but soon another disaster unfolded. Romm's family, on learning that their son had turned into an actor, had armed one of his brothers with a stick to come and chase him, creating a scandal. Luckily, we were able to warn him in time to hide between the boards under the stage, from where he made a dramatic escape.

Thus overcoming all obstacles, we finally finished with more than passing success, and were invited to put on another performance for all the biggest wheels in town at the home of Miss Zhupovitz, the lady dentist in German Street.

I especially received rave reviews from members of the fairer sex, who insisted that I would undoubtedly develop into a major talent. I thus should have ended up in Hollywood, competing with Paul Muni and the other stars! What a chance missed!

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The Hebrew Printing House in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book p 96*

Adv. Sh. Shibolet-Zang

Translated by Chaim Charutz

After World War I, when the Jews of Keidan began to return from their places of exile, two Torah students decided to set up a small print shop to serve needs of the community. They were Alter Movshovitz and Motl Kagan, who had previously been a teacher in Keidan. Prior to the war, there had been in town a small printing press, on which the owner of the stationery shop used to print greeting cards, invitations and announcements. The shop owner set the type manually and operated the press himself.

Our two partners had bigger things in mind. They began seeking clients who were interested in printing religious books and commentaries. For this purpose they purchased a real press and typesetting system.

The two did not merely typeset and print their orders. All the work of installation, editing, and proofreading for typographical and author errors fell on the heads of these Torah students, who took it as their personal responsibility. They were sometimes forced to take the arduous path of reading published texts, the books of sages, Torah and its commentaries, checking the manuscripts they received for errors and correcting them based on their own knowledge.

It was thus no accident that the reputation of the Keidan printing house was very high among scholars and writers throughout Lithuania, as well as in other countries. The story was told of the rabbi of Veikshne (Viekśniai), who later became rabbi of Keidan. He was the late, martyred Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber, of blessed memory, who traveled to Kovno to find a publisher for his manuscript. In Kovno he was told that if he wanted to publish a Torah commentary, he should go to the Keidan printers. He indeed had his manuscript printed in Keidan and, while he was there, he was invited by the Keidaners to apply for the position of rabbi.

The printing house developed and grew, and came to employ many workers. The manual typesetting system could not keep up with the increased demand for printing. So Motl Kagan traveled to Kovno to buy a used typesetting machine from one of the larger printing houses in that city. There, a friend and former student from his teaching days told him that if the press had enough work to require a typesetting machine, they should try to purchase a new American Linotype.

In fact, the owners did buy the first Linotype, and the Keidan printing house grew as a producer of both religious and national literature. This can be seen in the extensive list of books that were printed there during the life of the business, and it became a great source for lovers of Hebrew literature.

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Hebrew Books Printed in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor book, pp 97-104.*

Translated by Bella Golubchik

1923
"Beit Israel," Innovations on tractate *Shabbat* by scholars of *Beit Hamidrash*, edited by Sh. Berlin, Keidan, 1923, 1924, 1925 (72 pages, 72 pages and 149 pages).

1924
"Le Plagot Reuven." On rabbinic divisions and connections from the end of each tractate to its beginning or to the adjacent tractate, according to their order... *pilpul* on laws and legends, by Zelig Reuven Ben Tzvi Bengis, part 1, Kovno (284 pages). Part 4 (288 pages), 1939.

1925
"Hashlamat HaMidot." An inspiration to continuously study and research Torah values on relations between man and his creator and between a person and his neighbor, by Sh. Fainsilber, (76 pages).

"Tzemach David," Innovations, answers and commentaries on Talmud, collected by Rappoport (158 pages).

1926
"Khelko Shel Yosef," Innovations on Talmud and Maimonides, by Yosef Zusmanovich.

1927
"Higayon Yitzhak," Clarifications on all declarations in Talmud, by Y. A. Friedman (176 pages).

"Truat Melech," Innovations and Clarifications..., by Y. Zusmanovich, (256 pages).

1928
"Or HaTzafon," Talks and instruction by our master, teacher and rabbi Nathan Tzvi Finkel. Published periodically in Slabodka by Rabbis Y. A. Sher and A. Grodzensky. Five booklets - Kovno – Keidan, 1928 – 1929, each 12 or 14 pages.

"HaMedaber Bil'shon Arav," Part 1, Basics of the Arabic language... for those who know Hebrew, by Akiva Golenfol. (73 pages).

"Makor Baruch," Investigations, comments, illuminations, clarifications on difficult issues and regulations in the teaching of Maimonides on matters of sanctity and purity, part 1, by Nachum Baruch Ginzburg. (136 pages).

"Mishlei im Perush Or Noga," by Raphael Grushkin. (159 pages).

"P'nei Avraham," Legal answers with innovations in Talmud and Maimonides, by A.Y. Perlman. (214 pages).

"Tisha Prakim LeRambam," Innovations and explanations on 9 chapters of divorce laws by Maimonides, by Sh. Z. Pines. (108 pages).

1929
"Erez BeLevanon," Eulogy on Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor, by A.P. Aharonsohn. (31 pages). (1st edition - Frankfurt am Main, 1897).

"Derech HaMelech," Innovations and explanations on Maimonides, by Kh. Y. Khoidinsky. (112 pages).

"Drashot Eliezer," part 1. For all seasons of the year and festivals with declarations on completion of tractates, by A. Shapira. (224 pages).

"HaLeumiyut VeHaam HaYvri" ("On nationality and the Jewish people,") by P.B. Aleksandrovich. (54 pages).

"Kheker Yitzhak," Innovations on Talmud issues and declarations, by Y.A. Friedman. (196 pages). (Addenda to his book: *"Higayon Yitzhak"*).

"Lev HaAryeh," On issues of faith and explanations of the Bible and sayings of the Mishna sages, by A. Meyerovich. (24 pages). (The cover states "Riga," but it was actually printed in Keidan).

"A History of Keidan (Kedainiai) and its rabbis," by M. Markovich. (13 pages). (1st edition – Warsaw, 1913).

"A history of Rassein (Raseiniai) and its rabbis," by M. Markovich. (40 pages) (1st edition – Warsaw, 1913)

"Seder Hakafot KeMinhag Yurburg" ("The order of the [Simchat Torah] procession according to Yurburg tradition"). (24 pages).

"Tzvi Gaon Yaakov," Questions and answers with innovations on Mishna tractates, by Y. Oppenheim. (190 pages). (The cover states "Riga" but it was printed in Keidan).

"Kol Bochim," Eulogy on the death of Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor, by B. Yafit. (18 pages). (1st edition - Warsaw, 1897).

"Tvuot Shemesh," Laws on purifying dishes and references to first and last rabbinic authorities, by M. M. Shapira. (186 pages).

"Tfilat HaDerech,". (Redelheim, 1836; Leipzig, 1844; Warsaw, 1885; Vilna, 1903; Lvov, 1913).

1930
"Eize Neshech," Innovations and clarifications on *Shulchan Aruch, Yore De'ah,* by Sh. Z. Pines. (186 pages).

"Dvar Avraham," Questions and answers with innovations on Mishna issues, part 1, by Dov Shapira. (327 pages). (1st edition - Warsaw-Piotrkow, 1906-1913).

"Sefer Avodat Levi," Includes innovations on laws and explanations of issues in Maimonides and methods concerning blessings and purifications, by Y. Ruderman. (158 pages).

1931
"Or HaYashar," On tractate Chullin, by our Teacher and Rabbi, Shmuel Yitzhak Hillman. (141 pages). (On tractate Zevachim, Jerusalem, 1938; on tractate Menachot, Jerusalem, 1938).

"Hadarat Israel," Discussions upon finishing the Mishna and some tractates, (228 pages).

"Khibbat Shmuel," Clarifications on division and choice and sentences of Tannaim... by Sh. Rudniya. (170 pages).

"Kitvei Beit Israel," Innovations on Mishna issues (on tractate Eruvin), compilers from the Beit Hamidrash Slobodka (Kovno). (168 pages). (part 1, Berlin 1923).

"Maaseh HaShem," Clarifications on legends of Talmud, by Yitzhak Aharon of Vilkomir. (24 pages). (1st edition - Jerusalem 1892).

"Nativ Meir," On Maimonides, by Meir Leib Metz.

1932
"Higayon HaTalmud," To understand logic and methods of the Talmud sages, by M. Sh. Yefet. (90 pages).

"Khidushei Halachot," Setting an accent on *Shulchan Aruch*, by M. Grodzinsky. (148 pages).

"Mizrach Shemesh; Ein HaShemesh," Clarifications on the book of our teacher and rabbi Yaakov Levi Molin, by Moshe Meishel Shmuel Shapira.

"Mishpatei Yaakov," On the issues in tractate *Kiddushin* (order *Nashim*), by Y. Kastin. Kovno-Keidan 1932-1935.

"Sde Yitzhak," Innovations and clarifications with *halachic* rulings on different issues, by Y. Begun. (366 pages).

1933
"Meshabeyakh...," Additions to the book *Mashbiakh*, to discuss and clarify unclear passages in the Jerusalem Talmud, by M. Sh. Zivitz. (22 pages).

1934
"HaSefer al Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor," "The book of Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor," by D. Biska. (31 pages).

"HaSefer al mot Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor" "On the death of Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor," by L. Frumkin. (12 pages). (1st edition - London 1896).

"Zera Chaim," On the book *"Zera Yitzhak"* of Chaim Yitzhak Shilman, by Yosef Zusmanovich. Printed together with:
"Zera Yitzhak," Discussions on the Mishna and declarations, by Chaim Yitzhak Shilman. (368 pages).

"Khochmat HaEmet VeHaMada" On the essence of the world and nature, and clarification on the act of creation, by A.M. Volkovsky. (80 pages).

"Yeriyot Shlomo". Clarification on the order of worship and sacrifices according to Maimonides, by Sh. Fainsilber. (268 pages).

"Keter Shem Tov," On the differences in custom and prayers between Sephardic Jews in the East and their Ashkenazic brothers in the West, based on sources and reasoning, starting from Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and on the books of the first and last sages, by Sh.T. Gagin. (817 pages). (2nd edition - London 1948, 423 pages).

"Tzvi Israel," Clarifications on Torah, by Israel of Baltrimantz (Butrimonys), (160 pages) (1st edition - Vilna 1898).

"LeToldot HaYehudim BeKovno VeSlabodka" "On the History of Jews in Kovno and Slobodka," part 1 includes an introduction on the history of Jews in Zamut, Lithuania, by D.M. Lipman. (31 pages).

1935
"Divrei Yechezkel," Halachic innovations and clarifications on Mishna issues, Y. Bernstein. (308 pages).

"Dorot Rishonim," On the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* (Talmudic sages), letters aleph and beth, by A.Sh. Kushes. 1935-1937.

"Drashot VeHespedim" by Hillel, son of Rabbi Ze'ev of Kovno... (184 pages) (1st edition - Warsaw 1804).

"Mlechet Avodat HaKodesh," On the order of worship and prayer by Y.L. Yafo. (86 pages).

"Sefer Nachalat Shmuel," Includes deep *halachic* issues and regulations and clarifies Maimonides' method concerning sanctifications and forbidden foods... by Sh. Melamed. (140 pages). Accompanied by a pamphlet: *"Divrei Bina"* by his brother, the honorable Rabbi Yitzhak Ze'ev Melamed).

"Nishmat Yaakov," Clarifications on legends of the Talmudic sages, by M. Kvit. (68 pages).

"Takanot Ezra," Clarifications and innovations on Maimonidies and the tractate *Meyla*, by E.Altshuler. (168 pages). (1st edition – Piotrkow 1931, 216 pages).

1936
"Divrei Chaim," Matters of *halacha* and legends in tractate *"Avoda Zara"* by Z. Sherel. (120 pages) (The cover states "Riga," but it was printed in Keidan).

"Zichron Yekutiel," A history of Lithuania's rabbis and prominent men, by Z. Levitas. (198 pages).

"Maor Aggada," Explanations of legends, by M. Rabinovich. (180 pages).

"Shaar Yehoshua," Israel's law in theory and practice, by Meir Hacohen Kaplan.

1937
"Yesodot Hinuch HaDat LeDor," Based on Torah studies and scientific research..., (208 pages) . ("Riga" on the cover, but printed in Keidan).

"Tilei Denezikin," Innovations on three *babaot* [of tractate *Baba Metzia*, order *Nezikin*], by B.Y. Gindon. (192 pages). (1st edition – Eydtkuhnen,1873).

"Maalot HaTorah VeHaMitzvot" On acceptance of destiny and being ready for self-sacrifice, by M. Sh. Erdman. (112 pages).

"Sipurim Ktzarim" ("Short Stories") First collection, by Yosef Liebenzon. (60 pages).

"Pirkei Shira...," Various prayers, songs of praise and joy, mourning and lamentation, sayings on wisdom and ethics and an explanation of seeking material benefit from heaven, by Shem Tov Gagin. (193 pages plus three pictures). (see *"Keter Shem Tov,"* 1934; "Letters of adoration," 1939).

"Kol Avot," Commentaries on tractate *Avot*, by Y. Litvin. (226 pages). ("Riga" on the cover, but printed in Keidan.)

"Truat Melech," Innovations and clarifications on tractate *Rosh Hashana*, by Y. Zusmanovich. (256 pages).

1938
"Be'al Pe" ("By word of mouth"), A response on *halacha* dealing with fictitious sanctification by V. Levi. (42 pages). (2nd edition - Jerusalem 1941) (48 pages).

"Dinei Netilat Yadayim" ("Laws of hand washing"), by Rabbi Naftali Hirtz of Riteve (Retavas). (16 pages). (1st edition – Koenigsberg 1860).

"Zmirot LeShabbat VeYom Tov," written and sung by Eliezer Lieberman... (264 pages). (1st edition - Prague 1657).

"Likutei Mohara'm" by Rabbi Meir, head of the rabbinical court in Schwerin. Short and simple explanations of legends told by Talmud sages with commentaries (*"Minchat Shai"*) by Rabbi Shalom Yitzhak Levitan. (122 pages). (Berlin edition 1717). "*Minchat Shai*," also issued separately.

"MeZichronot Yemei Yalduti Be Ir Dvinsk" ("Memoir of my childhood days in Dvinsk"), by Mrs. Sarah Feige Paner (Meinkin). (64 pages). (1st edition - Warsaw 1903). See *"Habat Yesharim,"* A story of modern times – Vilna, 1881 (149 pages); *"Beged Bogdim*," A story of the days of Shimon Hacohen, the Great – Warsaw, 1891 (36 pages); *"Derech Yeladim*," A story of Jerusalem, during the days of King Herod – Vienna, 1882.

"Sefer MiKolot Hadmama," Including songs based on holy blessings, by Tuvia Meirovich. (80 pages).

"Avodat HaMelech," Explanations of Maimonides' book of science, by M. Krakovsky. (250 pages). (Another edition – Vilna, 1931, 238 pages).

"Ateret Mordechai," Questions and answers, stressing the issue of the "Oven of Aknai" by A. Zelbovich. (220 pages). ("Riga" on the cover, but printed in Keidan).

"Aliyot Eliyahu," Life history of Eliyahu of Vilna (*HaGra*) and his books, by Y. H. Levin . (108 pages). (Vilna, 1856, 120 ,pages; Stettin (now Poland) 1856; Stettin 1861; Vilna 1875; Warsaw 1881; Vilna 1885; Warsaw 1903; Vilna 1913).

"Emek HaBacha" Concerning burning of the dead and miscarriage, clearing water, haircutting the beard, etc... by Sh. M. Adler. (359 pages).

"Rabbi Israel Salanter," His life, activities and books, by Sh. Rozenfeld. (88 pages). (1st edition - Warsaw 1914).

1939

"Imrei Chaim," Various innovations and clarifications, by Shimshon Markovich. (104 pages).

"Binat Mikra," On Biblical melodies and cantillation, by Menashe ben Yosef Ben Porat of Ilia (now Belarus). (56 pages). (1st edition - Grodno 1818). See *"Shekel Hakodesh,"* Clarifications on sayings of Talmud sages about three groups of people on the Day of Judgement and sayings of Maimonides on this issue, Kopust (now Kopys, Belarus), 1823.

"De'at Mordechai," Questions and answers, clarifications, illuminations and notes on different *halachic* fields, on four parts of the *"Shulchan Aruch"* concerning sanctifications... part 1, edited and arranged by M.Y. Rabinovich, together with a pamphlet "*Ein Yitzhak*". (212 pages).

"Khovat Haaretz," Law regulations, donations, tithings and bread donations in the Land of Israel and outside of it, at the end of the book – explanations on growing citrus and subtle issues of observing commandments, by M. Kravitz. (48 pages).

"Yom Kippur Katan," Prayers for *Rosh Khodesh* according to Ashkenazic tradition, (84 pages). (According to the editions of Prague 1692 and Karlsruhe 1799). (148 pages).

"Likutei Shoshanim," On family purity and other issues, by Meir Hacohen Kaplan..

"Mizmorei Tehilim LeMotzaei Shabbat" ("Psalms and songs for the end of Shabbat"), (112 pages) (According to the Vilna editions of 1877).

"Michtavei Tehila" ("Letters of Glory") about the book *"Keter Shem Tov"* (about customs), by Sh.T. Gagin. (116 pages). (Cover states "London," but printed in Keidan).

"Nakhal Yitzhak," Innovations and clarifications on *Shulchan Aruch*, by Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor z'ts'l[67]. (360 pages).

"Slichot miKol haShana keMinhag Polin VeLita VeRassein VeZamot" ("Repentance prayers for the whole year in the traditions of Poland, Lithuania, Raseiniai and Zamut") (164 pages).

"Slikhot Minhag Lita VeRassein" ("Repentance traditions of Lithuania and Raseiniai") (According to the Direnfort edition 1861).

"Kinot leTish'a b'Av keMinhag Lita veRassein" ("Lamentations for the 9th of Av, in the traditions of Lithuania and Raseiniai") (82 pages).

"Sha'arei HaVestot," On family purity, by Meir Hacohen Kaplan.

"Shefa Yamim," Innovations on Mishna issues in tractates *Shabbat, Eruvin* and *Pesahim*, by Y.A. Kastin. (120 pages).

1940
"Even Israel," Sermons, innovations and questions and answers, by Rabbi Israel (Lipkin) Salanter. (48 pages). A disciple of Rabbi Salanter, Shneur Zalman Hirshovich, Rabbi of Goldingen (now Kuldiga, Latvia), collected the material and had it published in Warsaw in 1883, with his own addendum *"Even Bokhan,"* however, the Keidan edition contains only the teaching of Rabbi Salanter.

"Or Israel," Essays on the study of piety and ethics, by Israel (Lipkin) Salanter; *"Netivot Or,"* Essays on ethics, by his disciple Rabbi Yitzhak Blezer with additions – *"Kochvei Or"* and *"Shaarei Or"* on the way of repentance, (184 pages) (1st edition - Vilna 1900, final edition, Munich 1947). See A.R. Malachi: *"Di shefer fun der musar bavegung"* (The founder of the Musar movement) in the anthology "Lita," New York, 1951.

"Khidushei HaRabad" (Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquieres in Provence). On tractate *Baba Kama*. Published according to a single manuscript in the British Museum, with introduction, notes and commentaries by Shmuel Atlas. (478 pages). (Cover states "London" but published in Keidan.) "It was my intention to broaden the discussion on the "Rabad" in general, and on the book in particular, but due to the complex political situation of the time and because of the fear of war that dominated, I hurried to complete the book, based on the words of our sages, of blessed memory. "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task"[68] - From the introduction (page 46) by Mr. Atlas dated 1st day of Rosh Khodesh Elul, 1939; critique in *"Kiriat Sefer"* (volume 2, pages 25-28) by A. Kh. Freiman.
Likely the last (Hebrew) book printed in Lithuania.

"Khidushei U'beurei HaGra meVilna" ("Innovations and clarifications by the Vilna Gaon"), collected from his books by A. Drushkevich. (136 pages). (1st edition - Vilna 1926).

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[67] *Zekher tzadik lebracha* – let the memory of the righteous be blessed

[68] Ethics of the Fathers, 2:16

"Khidushim BeSugiyot HaShas VeHadrushim" ("Innovations on the Mishna, issues and sermons"), by Aharon of Riga. (98 pages). (He also wrote *"Minkhat Aharon"* Koenigsberg, 1859, 252 pages.

"Taharat Hamishpakha" On purity issues, by A.D. Kahana. (136 pages).

"Ma'amarim MiSikhotav shel Rabenu Hgh"kh Maran Yerucham Halevy" (Articles on discussions with our Rabbi and Teacher, *Gaon* Yerucham Halevy"), recorded in Yiddish and translated to the holy language (Booklet 4, by Yerucham Lebovich. (64 pages).

"More Nevuchei Hazman," Research on divinity, eternity of soul, principles of faith, religion and choice, by Sh.Z. Aharonsohn. (386 pages) (1st edition - Vilna 1908).

"Pri Yitzhak," Questions and answers with comments... by Yitzhak Blazer (Rabbi Yichele Peterburger). (424 pages). (1st edition, part 1 – Vilna, 1881, part 2 – Jerusalem, 1913).

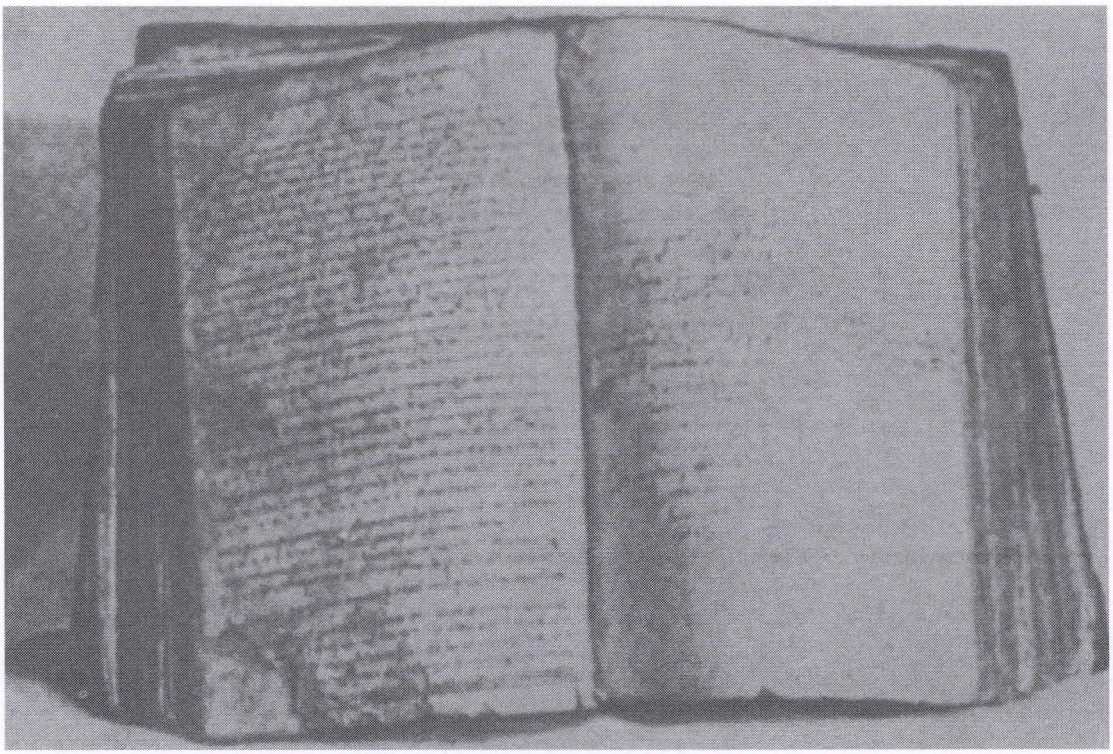
Number of books printed by town (in alphabetic order):

Keidan (Kedainiai)	109
Kovno (Kaunas)	109
Mariample (Marijampolė)	3
Rassein (Raseiniai)	1
Shavli (Šiauliai)	1
Telz (Telšiai)	3
Vilkomir (Ukmergė)	1
Vilkovishk (Vilkaviškis)	2
Virbein (Virbalis)	1
total	230

Remarks:

1919: First Hebrew book appeared in independent Lithuania in Mariampole.
1921: First Hebrew book printed in Kovno.
1924: First Hebrew book printed in Keidan.
1940: The last Hebrew book printed in Keidan.

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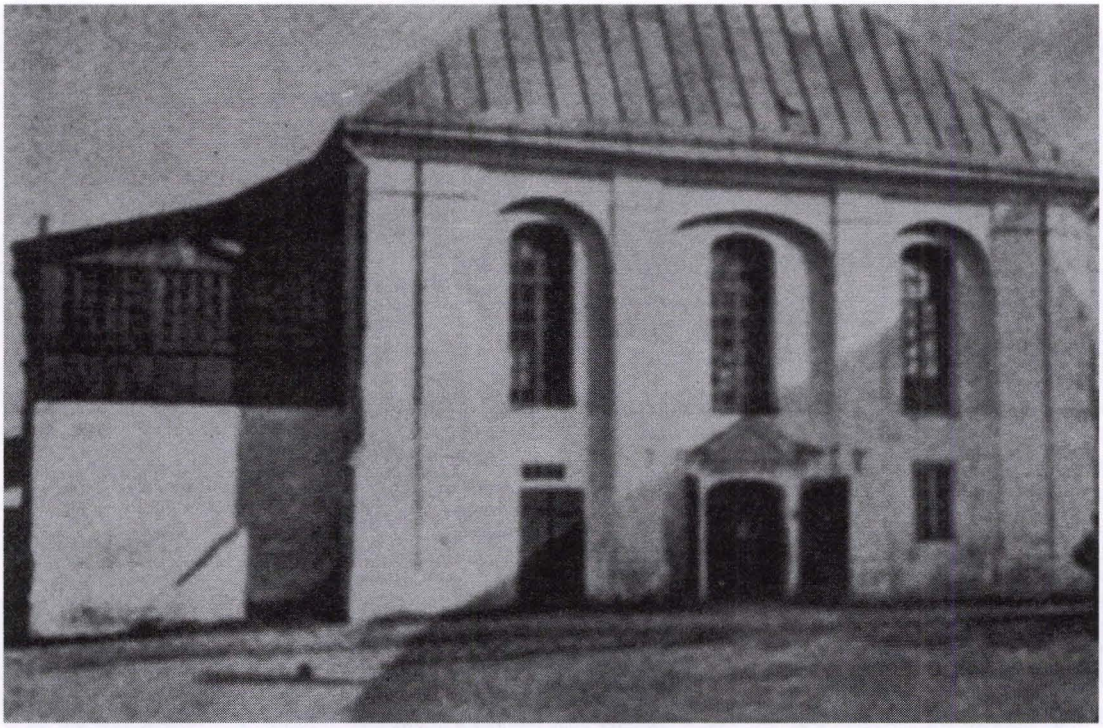
"The ledger is open, but the hand no longer writes..." (a paraphrase of Rabbi Akiva in Ethics of the Fathers: "The ledger is open and the hand is writing...")



The square by the large Bet Midrash (study house).



The large Bet Midrash (study house).



The Great Shul (synagogue).



The wooden synagogue – "the Soldiers' Kloyz."



A section of Smilga Street, next to the well.



The house in which M. L. Lilienblum was born in 1843. (died 1910).



A section of Langer Gas (Long Street), 1967.



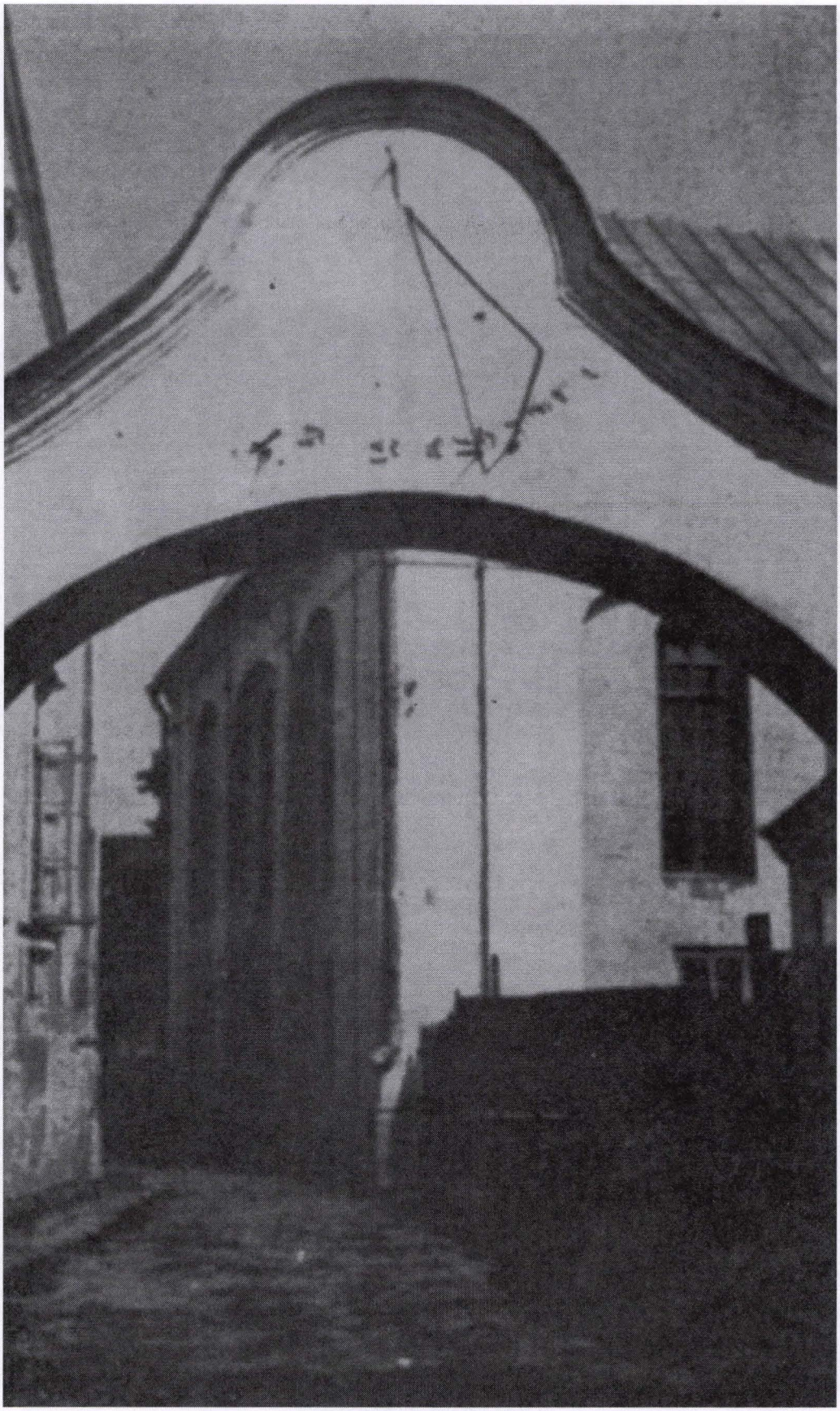
The market.



The bridge over the Neviazhe (Nevėžis) river

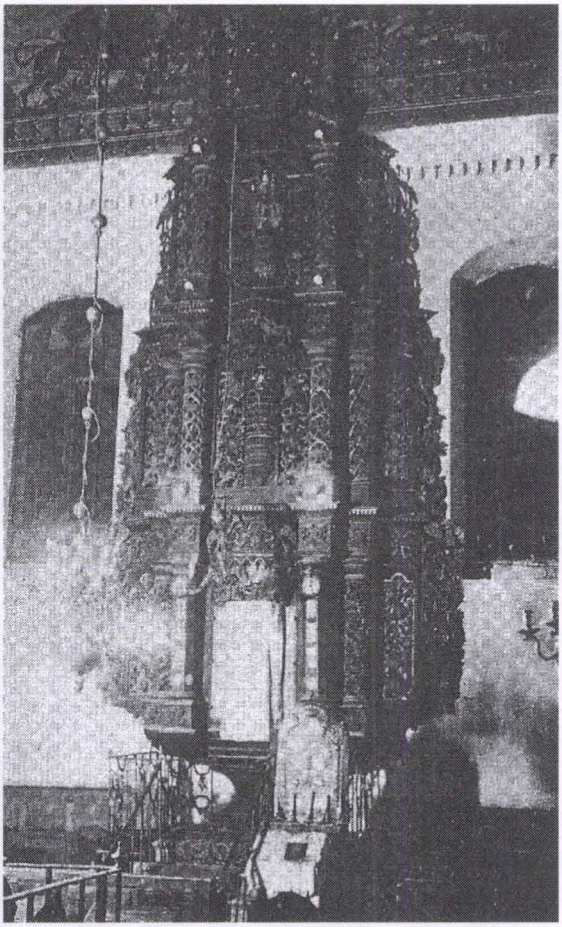


The Neviazhe (Nevėžis) river



The sundial at the entrance of the Shul.





Top right: The aron hakodesh (ark of the Torah), a hand-made work of art in wood.
Top left: The lectern, with a quotation: "Know before Whom you stand"



The "kloyz" synagogue.

Religious Life
חיי דת

Synagogues in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 105-110*

Yehezkel Rochin, Kibbutz Ramat Rachel

Translated by Chaim Charutz

There were seven synagogues in Keidan. Four of them were in the *shulhoyf*, [the central religious courtyard]; two more were in Smilga Street, and one was across the [Neviazhe] river.

I can briefly recount the many different things that I remember about synagogues in Keidan. However, most of the details retained in my memory are of the large *beit-hamidrash* [house of study], where my father used to pray, and where my grandfather had been the *shamash* [synagogue assistant or caretaker].

All major town events took place in those days in the synagogues. An emissary would come from the Land of Israel; a *maggid* [itinerant preacher] would come to town to deliver an exhortation about ethics; there were electoral meetings before the Zionist congresses, and from time to time, the local rabbi would preach a sermon. All these events would stir great interest among the congregants. Most of these events, however, took place in the large *beit-hamidrash*.

The *beit-hamidrash*

There were two rooms, called "*shtiblekh*," in the corridor of the *beit-hamidrash*. In one of these rooms, the *minyan* [prayer group] called "*Tiferet Bachurim*" ["Young Men's Glory "] held its services for many years. This was made up of local youth. They also had *gabbais* [congregational officials or administrators] who managed all their affairs. A number of *minyans* [prayer groups] met there on weekdays, the most important being the first one of the day. Those who wished to pray early would come then because they had to go to work; later on they would pray in the large *beit-hamidrash*. At other hours a small yeshiva used the *shtiblekh*. This yeshiva was connected to the Slobodka Yeshiva [in a suburb of Kovno]. Some of its students were local youths, while others were young people from all over Lithuania. Most, however, were from small towns close to Keidan, such as Datnova (Dotnuva), Krok (Krakės), Yasven (Josvainiai), Shat (Šėta), etc. The local youths studied in the mornings at other schools, and only came to the yeshiva in the afternoon.

Many memories arise in my mind from that period, because I often would help my grandfather at the *beit-hamidrash*. The yeshiva students used to sit at the tables and study *Gemara* and *Mishna*. The local rabbi would sit at one table and give a lesson. At a second table, the teacher-instructor would give a lesson, while my grandfather, of blessed memory, would give his lesson at a third table. I remember that, at the end of a tractate, the students would break off their studies, sit down and celebrate with a drop of brandy, biscuits and chopped herring.

But the synagogue was not used only for prayers and for studies. Jewish life in Keidan, in all its forms, was reflected there. Once a Jew was arrested in the town for illegal trade and left a wife and small children at home. On the Sabbath, before the reading of the Torah, his wife entered the synagogue and delayed the Torah reading until the congregation promised to do everything they could to free her husband.

Before the elections to the Zionist Congress, posters were put up in the synagogues by all the political parties; children would remove posters of the opposing parties. This sometimes produced scuffles, and eventually the parents became involved in these fights. One fine day, the *beit-hamidrash* gabbais decided they would no longer allow posters to be affixed there. They put a net with a lock over the poster crate and told my grandfather not to allow any of the parties to stick posters on the crate or on the walls. This happened on Friday, just before candle-lighting time. Representatives of the "*Poalei Zion*" [Eretz-Israel Labor party), approached me, as a member of Hashomer Hatzair [a leftist Zionist youth movement], and asked me to put posters in the *beit-hamidrash*. I took the keys from my grandfather, opened the large crate and stuck the Poalei Zion posters on it. I closed the crate and gave the keys back to my grandfather, pretending that I knew nothing.

The Sabbath arrived, and congregants started coming to the *beit-hamidrash*. They suddenly noticed that the crate was full of posters. One of the *gabbais* was a supporter of the Revisionists, and all his children were members of Beitar [the Revisionist youth movement]. He started questioning grandfather about the matter, asking who stuck up the posters. Grandpa, of course, did not know what to tell him. He just said: "I sent my grandson to do something at the *beit-hamidrash*, and he must have let them put up the posters." The *gabbai* approached me and started reprimanding me for what I had done. I didn't answer him and just got out of there. Meanwhile, the Sabbath had started, and it was forbidden to remove the posters, so as not to violate the Sabbath, and so they remained there all Saturday. The supporters of Poalei Zion very much enjoyed the whole incident.

Here is another interesting incident connected with the *beit-hamidrash*. On Yom Kippur eve, after *mincha* [afternoon prayers], the congregants used to hang around the *beit-hamidrash*, paying off all their debts before going off to eat their final meal before the fast. For this purpose, there were special bowls in which they put their money. This custom developed so that each Jew could pray with the feeling that he did not owe any money. Pesach Weitzer (Chitin) used to come to the *beit-hamidrash* as a representative of the Jewish National Fund. Because he did not have a partner, Pesach used to call me to sit with him next to the bowls. I was then a boy of 12. We finished our job, and I also signed the report. One day, when the reports were being checked, one of the checkers was my sister, who was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. Suddenly, she saw her younger brother's signature. I remember how she laughed and enjoyed herself when she told me about it.

I particularly loved the eve of Shavuot, when they would sit the whole night at the *beit-hamidrash* to learn and pray *Tikkun*[69]. First thing in the morning they would pray *shacharit* and *musaf*[70], then go home, eat a dairy meal and lie down to sleep. Afterward they would return to the *beit-hamidrash* for a second *musaf*, in order to recite *Akdamot*[71], which was omitted from the earlier service.

One day, a well-known cantor came to Keidan. He had once been a cantor in our town. His name was Herzl Kussevitsky and he had a beautiful voice. He used to come occasionally to Keidan for our enjoyment at the Sabbath *musaf* or to pray *ma'ariv* [evening prayers] – a sort of concert. Tickets were not sold for his performances, but a stand with a plate was placed near the entrance, and everyone would put money on the plate. One such event was on a Sunday before *ma'ariv,* and it seems that not many people came that day. The *gabbais* waited for the *beit-hamidrash* to fill up, because it was important for the plate to be full of money. On the same evening, there was a wedding party at the fire brigade hall, because the

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[69] *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* – a tradition involving the study of Torah and other religious texts throughout the first night of Shavuot.

[70] *Shacharit* – the daily morning prayer. *Musaf* – an addition to the regular morning, afternoon and evening prayers.

[71] A religious poem in Aramaic, which is recited on Shavuot

brigade commander, Tzadok Shlapobersky, was getting married, and his friends wanted the cantor to sing there. A delegation arrived at the *beit-hamidrash* and started trying to persuade the cantor to come to the brigade hall to give them a concert. The cantor gladly accepted the invitation. He looked around in all directions, grabbed the plate with the money and ran off with the brigade delegation to their hall. However, since this hall was very close to the *beit-hamidrash*, everything ended up for the best: the cantorial concert, which he should have performed at the *beit-hamidrash*, he performed at the fire brigade hall. I would imagine that this concert did not include a *ma'ariv* prayer.

Older people tell me that when he was a cantor in Keidan, he used to sit on Fridays in the shop of the hatter Moshe Wolpe and listen to recordings of cantorial music on the gramophone. That evening he would pray in the same style that he had heard earlier on the gramophone.

Another event at this *beit-hamidrash* comes to my mind. I think this happened in 1934. My grandfather was very ill and my father took over his work as *shamash*. It was then customary for all the honors for the whole year at the *beit-hamidrash* to be sold on Simchat Torah. These honors included opening and closing the Holy Ark, raising up or rolling the Torah scrolls, etc. The shamash used to stay on a stand next to the ark, announcing the honor. Anyone raising the price would receive the honor. Some local pranksters decided to have some fun with the town's solid citizens. A group got together and decided to buy all the honors for the whole year. When the sale of raising and rolling the scrolls started, this honor went to the pranksters. They immediately started making plans: For example, on Shabbat *Bereishit*[72] they would give the raising to the rabbi and the rolling to some town porter; on another Shabbat, they would give the raising to one of the honorable heads of household, and the rolling to a carter or another lower-class Jew.

A huge row broke out in the town. How could such a thing happen?! The *gabbais* came to my father and asked why he sold this honor to this group. He answered: "This matter doesn't interest me. A Jew who comes to the *beit-hamidrash* to pray has the same right as anyone else. Apart from that, I cannot see from the pulpit which Jew is giving more." In the meantime, they decided that the pranksters would not divide the honors that they had won on the forthcoming Shabbat *Bereishit*, but that the *gabbais* would do this.

The gabbais then decided to go to the rabbi to convene a religious court with some of the pranksters. I remember how we walked around in front of the rabbi's house. The rabbi heard the claims of both sides, the pranksters and the gabbais. He tried to persuade the pranksters to give up their hard-won rights. They finally accepted the rabbi's authority, but on condition that, in return for their compromise, the gabbais would build a pavement around the *beit-hamidrash. I* don't know if they actually built the pavement, because I left Keidan the same year.

The Great Synagogue

And now for something on the Great Synagogue. This was one of the most splendid synagogues in Lithuania. The holy ark in this synagogue was built by an artist and was thought to be one of the most beautiful in the whole country. This synagogue was used for prayers in the summer only, from Passover through the High Holy Days. The reason was that this synagogue was designed for summer use only, without a stove or any other means of heating. In winter, prayers were held in the building which stood at the side of the synagogue. That building had a stove and was kept warm.

[72] The first Sabbath after Simchat Torah, when the reading of Torah restarts from the beginning.

Concerts of cantorial music were always held in this synagogue. The famous cantor Kussevitsky also appeared here. I remember that even Christians used to come to hear him. Among these were the mayor, local priests and even senior *gabbais* of the army garrison posted in Keidan. There was once also a concert given by the cantor of Kovno (I think his name was Friedlander), together with his choir.

When the "*Yavne*" school was established in Keidan without its own building, the children studied in this synagogue in the women's section. In winter they studied in the winter building that was used for prayers. This situation did not last for long, however, as a building was soon found for the school.

On Lithuanian Independence Day, there were big celebrations, with flag-raising ceremonies in the market square. There were long speeches given by the city fathers and the army gabbais. Quite often, Lithuanian President Smetona[73] would participate in these speeches. Later, the soldiers and the Christians who participated in the celebrations went to church across the river. After all this, the Jews, school pupils and members of the youth movements, the fire brigade and the ex-servicemen's organization used to gather at the great synagogue. Here, speeches were made in honor of Lithuania's liberation, psalms were recited, and the Lithuanian national anthem was sung. Later, the anthem was translated into Hebrew. The President of the Republic used to come to the synagogue and was seated next to the local Rabbi. The elders used to tell us that, during World War I, a cannon shell had hit the eastern wall of the synagogue.

During the High Holy Days, I used to go to this synagogue when a good cantor prayed there. Most of the time, this was the cantor Herzl Kussevitsky. One year, the cantor who prayed there was the permanent cantor of the beit-hamidrash. He came from a small town called Pikele (Pikeliai) and he had a beautiful voice. He was the type of cantor who used to be called "*baal tfilah*" [master of prayer], and it was a pleasure to hear him. That year I sat more in the great synagogue than in the beit-hamidrash where my father prayed.

The *Kloyz*

I can tell something of the *kloyz* because my father used to go there to study the *Ein Yaakov*[74]. In the *kloyz*, Moshe Milner, a very learned man, would sit at the table and study *Ein Yaakov* with a group. I would go there with my father, and we would enjoy Moshe Milner's explanations. After my mother, of blessed memory, died, I used to go there to pray *mincha*, because they prayed early there, at 1 p.m., and I had to go to work at the same time. On the Sabbath, after the *mincha* prayer, Reb Orchik Goldin, of blessed memory, used to gather children around the table and recite psalms. Later, he would distribute cakes and honey-cookies to the children. I remember the great celebration that was held at the housewarming party after the *kloyz* had been renovated and cleaned up. I was then a student in one of the lower classes of the school, and some of the pupils, myself included, decided not to go to school. We went instead to the *kloyz*. In the morning, during the *shacharit* prayer service, the Yankel Dushkes orchestra played, and the prayer session went on a long time that day. There was a big feast that evening, where the orchestra also played. Torah was studied, and speeches were made. One of the *gabbais* was Reb Motl Shapira of blessed memory, a very happy Jew who also knew how to pray beautifully. The party went on until midnight.

On *Simchat Torah*, the *kloyz* was the happiest place in the town. Reb Motl Shapira used to entertain the audience there. They used to drink much vodka and eat cakes. When the prayers and the *hakafot* [Torah procession] were completed in all the other synagogues, they used to come to see the procession at the *kloyz*, and how Motl Shapira used to conduct the

[73] Antanas Smetona, president of Lithuania 1919-20 and 1926-40.

[74] "Jacob's Well," a book of Talmudic stories and commentaries.

celebrations. The prayer service would not end there until part of the congregation staggered out blind drunk.

One day, a young man from another town arrived at the kloyz. No one knew where he was from. He sat down in the kloyz as if learning *Gemara*. When people came to pray, they found him dead. It appeared that he drank poison and committed suicide in the kloyz. Until he was buried, he was laid in the side-room next to the kloyz, and Orchick the *shamash* sat next to him all the time until the burial. Because he had committed suicide, he was buried, according to custom, on the other side of the fence.

The Gravediggers' Synagogue

There was another synagogue called the Gravediggers' Synagogue *("di kvernishe shul").* Those who prayed there were mainly from the Burial Society and the Psalm Society. This was a small synagogue. A number of events took place here. For example, the 19th of Kislev was a day of fasting and prayers for the Burial Society. On this day everybody would wake up early and say *slichot*[75], and the Burial Society people would fast. On the evening after the fast, they would arrange a big meal. Sometimes, the meal used to be held in the synagogue itself. Later, the meals were held in the house of one of the members of the Burial Society. At this meal, "drinking was according to the law; none did compel."[76]

Another important event used to take place at this synagogue. Twice a year, on Shavuot and on Shmini Atzeret [the eighth and last day of Succot], the Psalm Society used to have a small party for its dues-paying members. After prayer they would come to the synagogue, sit and drink a few glasses of vodka and eat cakes, and sometimes end with a song. I remember this tradition well, because I used to go there with my grandfather and my father, who were members of the Psalm Society.

When there was a funeral, the gravedigger used to arrive early with the horse and cart carrying the deceased. He would park the cart outside this synagogue until the time arrived for the funeral.

Other synagogues

There was another synagogue called *"Shiv'a Kruim."* I don't recall any special events connected with this synagogue, but I shall explain its name. In this synagogue, only seven men were called to the Torah, even when there was some special celebration among the congregants, such as a bar mitzvah. When someone celebrating a joyous occasion wanted many participants to rise to the Torah, he used to go to another synagogue at prayer times.

There was also a synagogue for soldiers in Keidan. Its name was "*di Soldatske shul.*" People older than me told me where the name came from. Before the first World War there was an army base in Keidan, and at that time there were many Jewish soldiers. The community took care to see that these soldiers had their own synagogue on Smilga Street, not far from the army barracks. This synagogue stood closed and unused for many years, but I think that it was restored in 1933 or 1934 and used by the "*Tiferet Bachurim*" congregation. In that period, 1935, I used to go there every morning to pray, as I was saying Kaddish for my mother of blessed memory, and I was considered a permanent member of the congregation. I therefore received the honor of passing before the Ark. I also used to lead prayers on Shabbat.

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[75] Penitential prayers, traditionally said before Rosh Hashana

[76] From the Book of Esther, 1:8. I.e., drinking was optional.

There was also a synagogue in Keidan across the river, which was simply called *"oyf yener zayt vaser"* [across the water]. I think it did not have services during the week, apart maybe for *shacharit*. A cantor who resided in Keidan prayed there. His name was Hirsch Bein, a tailor by profession. He served there as a permanent cantor on Shabbat and especially on holidays. He was blessed with a beautiful bass voice. On the High Holy Days, I used to go there for a while to listen to his prayers. From my father's stories, I also knew we had lived in that area before the first World War, and my father used to pray there.

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The Keidan Yeshiva *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 111-113*

Adv. Shimon Shibolet-Zang

Translated by Miriam Erez

As in every Jewish community, Keidan had its traditional *cheder*, which the children attended until about bar mitzvah age. Keidan always had many *cheders* and the various *rebbes* and *melameds* who taught Torah to children in these schools were remembered fondly.

Keidan for centuries also had a yeshiva, where Jewish youths, after their years studying in cheder, continued to study *Gemara* [Talmud] with well-known scholars and rabbis. The students studied there both individually and in classes — not in order to make Torah their life's work, but rather learning for its own sake — and Keidan's Torah scholars multiplied in number over the years.

We know for instance of Rabbi Yehezkel bar Avraham Katzenelenbogen, who was invited in 1707 to serve as rabbi of Keidan. He was a member of the rabbinate and managed the Keidan yeshiva until 1714, when he moved on to serve as rabbi of Altona in Germany.

Yehezkel's son, Rabbi David Katzenelenbogen, inherited his father's rabbinical position in Keidan, and his sons taught Torah and Gemara at the Keidan yeshiva, not only to pupils residing in Keidan, but also to those from the surrounding area.

Rabbi David's son, Rabbi Meshulam Katzenelenbogen, continued his father's and grandfather's tradition, also heading the Keidan yeshiva and teaching its students.

Rabbi Avraham, David's third son, went to Vilna around 1725, where he met the young prodigy Eliyahu ben Shlomo, whom he took to Keidan with him to study *Gemara* in Keidan's yeshiva. The boy Eliyahu later became famous, and was known as Rabbi Eliyahu the Vilna *Gaon* [genius].

During the same period, a young man known as Moshe bar Shimon Margalit resided in Keidan, where he had been born in 1710. In time he became a well-known commentator on the Jerusalem Talmud and later served as head of the Keidan rabbinical court. In the Keidan yeshiva, the boy Eliyahu from Vilna actually met Shimon Margalit, then a 15-year-old yeshiva student, who taught him Torah.

Rabbi Meshulam Zalman [Katzenelenbogen]'s son, Moshe Mordechai, also headed the Keidan yeshiva. The genius Rabbi Shmuel Salant, a Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem and founder of Etz Chaim yeshiva, which still exists today, came to Jerusalem from Lithuania in 1841. Rabbi Salant was still young when he left Lithuania, and he surprised people with his knowledge, acquired during his studies at the Keidan yeshiva before he made aliya to Eretz-Israel (he was called "the Keidan prodigy" by rabbis who taught him).

Rabbi Benyamin Ze'ev Wolf, known as Velvele of Keidan, was Keidan's rabbi and a head of the Keidan yeshiva from 1852. He had a sharp mind and was called "Iron Head." His students loved hearing his words of Torah. He passed away in 1865 in Keidan. When the *gabbais* [synagogue officials] wanted to raise his salary, he refused, telling them, "I don't want to rob Keidan."

Charles Lipschitz of New York, president of the Keidan Association there, wrote in his memoirs that he left Keidan in 1907, up to which time he was a student at the Keidan yeshiva.

Until the Keidan Jews were expelled in May 1915, classes were held in the large *beit-hamidrash* [house of study] that stood in the square at the extension of the synagogue street. Rabbi Avraham-Zvi bar Eliyahu-Baruch Kamai was Keidan's rabbi at that time, and a head of the yeshiva. He gave regular lessons in Gemara to the yeshiva students. After the expulsion in World War I he moved to Mir, where he served as rabbi and head of the famed Mir yeshiva. He died a martyr together with the rest of Mir's 900 Jews in 1941.

When Jews began returning to Keidan after the 1915 expulsion, they were joined by others

from surrounding towns as well as other places. One of these was Rabbi Shmuel Hanoch Altmuner, who then began to serve as rabbi in Keidan. The Keidan yeshiva came back to life, and Rabbi Altmuner taught Gemara there.

When Rabbi Shlomo Halevy Feinsilber was invited in 1924 to serve as Keidan's rabbi, Rabbi Altmuner continued serving as well, and both taught at the yeshiva. It was a beautiful sight to see the two rabbis with their followers sitting, holding lit candles and studying, and dozens of yeshiva students seated on benches in the *beit-hamidrash* next to lecterns, rocking back and forth, also holding lit candles, chanting melodically as they attempted to memorize a page of *Gemara*. Rabbi Feinsilber, may his righteous memory be blessed, taught at the yeshiva from the day he became chief rabbi until the bitter last day for Keidan's Jews, when they all were murdered and buried in a mass grave.

In addition to the traditional *cheder,* where children were taught the basics by *melameds* [teachers of young boys], and various other schools in Keidan, there was also a religious school founded by Rabbi Feinsilber, for Torah-related study, called *Beit Hatalmud*.

As soon as I had graduated from the Hebrew *real-gymnasium* [high school] in Kovno, the rabbi and director of *Beit Hatalmud* approached my parents and asked them to persuade me to stay on and teach Hebrew and secular subjects there. I took the position and stayed for two years at this school. Classes were held in the women's section of the *beit-hamidrash.*

Beit Hatalmud was a sort of preparatory school for the yeshiva. During that time, on the town rabbi's recommendation, I also taught religion classes to Jewish pupils of the government-run Lithuanian gymnasium. I would come in two or three times a week for two hours each time, during the times when the priest taught religion to the Christian pupils. The principal and teachers called me "young rabbi."

The last person to head the Keidan yeshiva was Rabbi Shimon Dubiansky, may his righteous memory be blessed. At the time of the horrible massacre in Keidan, he happened to be out of town, and he was taken to a labor camp. From there he was transferred to Dachau, where he perished.

The voice of Torah never ceased at the Keidan yeshiva, which nurtured many leaders of the Torah world. The Keidan yeshiva was known throughout the diaspora, and many strove to get there to learn Torah from its rabbis and spiritual leaders. There was even a saying, "Today, here; tomorrow in Keidan," describing the constant flow of rabbis and yeshiva students who came to Keidan to hear Torah wisdom.

As in all Lithuanian yeshivas, Keidan's yeshiva students learned both *Gemara* and *musar*[77], in contrast with yeshivas in Poland and elsewhere where the latter was not taught. The Keidan yeshiva was simply a hive of deep and thorough study, where the sound of the Torah was heard night and day, its students bent over their *Gemara* and *musar* books. My heart mourns the loss of Torah scholars in my Keidan.

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[77] *Musar* (literally, ethics or moral instruction) was a Jewish educational movement begun in the 19th century in Lithuania that stressed ethical and spiritual discipline.

Memories of My Teachers *Keidan Yizkor book, pp 114-118*

Meyer Yitzhak Edelman

Originally published by the Keidaner Assn of New York, 1930. Translated by Meyer Dwass.

1.

My first *rebbe* was Noach Reubens, who taught the youngest children. He lived on the northwest corner of the marketplace by German Street. The *cheder* took up the one room that constituted the teacher's home. In one corner of the room stood a sleeping bench covered with a wide board, under which was a mattress stuffed with straw. At night this was spread over two benches, creating additional sleeping space, while the front part of the sleeping-bench itself was pulled out for use as a bed.

The main entrance of the house, and thus of the *cheder*, was on the German Street side. You could also enter through the shop on the marketplace side of the building – the last in the row of so-called "little stores" – but this entrance was not for us schoolboys.

The door from the classroom to the store was split into upper and lower halves. The upper half stayed open during the day, while the lower half was almost always shut and bolted from the inside. The *rebbe* had nothing to do with the store, which was completely his wife's domain.

The meager merchandise in the store consisted of several bundles of hay, a small sack of oats, some sticks and straps for making horsewhips, some boxes of axle grease and a pitcher of fish oil. Since business was slow, the teacher's wife didn't need sales clerks. She did her household chores in the store, such as peeling potatoes, chopping up farfel, rolling out noodle dough, or grinding cinnamon, pepper or barley gruel for Sabbath.

The trade in hay and oats was slow, because a peasant usually brought his own from his home village, except when he would get drunk after a Thursday market and his horse, not knowing of thrift or thinking of the future, would eat up everything at once. This actually occurred fairly often, since the peasants weren't any more farsighted than their horses. Also, it was hard for them to avoid temptation: On the east side of the market was Yosi Breuer's bar; on the south side Aryeh Chaim Shmuel's, on the northeast Frantskevich's. Down the street on the north was Moshe Varneper's, a bit further on was Rishe Chaim Shloyme's, and on the west, the well-known Yankel Podratushe. You could get anything you wanted in these places.

Thursdays the trade in horsewhips picked up a bit, because as soon as a peasant turned away from his wagon a thief would steal his whip. There was a particular demand for the sticks, which were the first things to go in the many fights that broke out. And on market days business was very good in axle grease, since they couldn't get home unless the wheels were greased.

This reminds me of a debate that used to take place among peasants in more recent times, which went as follows: "Who's the richest Yid in town?" One peasant would say that the richest was "the bar owner." Another would say "the bagel baker." A third: "the owner of the dry goods store." A fourth: "the goldsmith." But finally they decided that the richest Jew was the one who sold axle grease, because you can manage, more or less, without anything else, but not without grease. Wheels have to be greased...

> Fish oil was mainly sold on Sundays to Catholics going to church, and to Jews on Friday afternoons. The teacher's wife would pour one or two kopecks worth of oil into a bowl and the customer would apply it with a brush to tops and sides of his boots, leaving proud and happy with his glistening footwear.

The *rebbe's* wife owned a goat, with gnarled horns like all goats, and a beard. I and the teacher's son Dovidke, who was my age, used to love to pull the goat's beard. We usually did this when neither the *rebbe* nor his wife was looking. The goat would often stand on its rear legs leaning on the half door to the store as if it were looking for a customer.

All this took place some 53 years ago, yet I recall the events as if they took place yesterday. The following happened in the middle days of Sukkot: The teacher came to our house to settle my school arrangements for the next term. We then went to my uncle Heishel's house where I was given an oral exam. The *rebbe* remarked that I distinguished well between "s" and "sh," and that I spoke with a decent accent.[78] My father was not too thrilled with the teacher's comments (possibly because in those days, Litvaks were proud of their accent).

2.

My second *rebbe* was Feive Lozers, who lived in a half-sunken shack in what was later called New Bath Street, between Yosel the *treybetsh*[79] and Sholem Konstantin, another teacher of older children. He had a thick cataract on one eye and taught in a voice so loud that we could hear him in our own *cheder*.

Our classroom was furnished with a long table made of simple planks, two long benches on either side and an old, broken chair at one end, on which the teacher sat upon a cushion. The entrance to the *cheder* was a door on the east side, which, due to the house's sinking, was so low that an average sized man had to bend when coming in to avoid hitting his head. For the same reason, the windows were also low, starting about 10 or 12 inches from the ground outside. Not having double panes, the windows in winter were covered with frost, which we would imprint with various coins when our teacher was out of the room. Underfoot was a plain dirt floor which the teacher's wife raked smooth every Friday afternoon.

Near the door on the south side of the classroom was the oven, with a bench cemented to it and a bucket of water nearby. By the west wall, two beds stood behind a dirty, colorless curtain. This was the room where I began to study *chumash*[80]. Our *rebbe* always carried a whip, and woe to the boy who strayed into some transgression! I first tasted that lash when I refused to put on my brother's hand-me-down coat, which had been crudely cut down for me. The coat was brought to school and my disobedience reported to the teacher.

The teacher had two sons. The older, Moshe, was very short, but he was called Moshe the Pine Tree. This wasn't meant to be ironic; rather, it referred to the time he was being examined for the military draft, and his mother, standing with dozens of other wailing mothers outside Mordechai Lipets' house, where the draft board sat, kept shrieking, "My little pine tree!"

At the end of the term my father examined my progress and decided that not only had I not advanced in *chumash*, but I had also fallen behind in my ability to read Hebrew. And during Passover week he found a new teacher for me – Israel Nakhman.

3.

My new *rebbe* lived on the east side of the marketplace, near the Neviazhe river. His *cheder* consisted of ten pupils, divided into two classes, or at times three. He taught us *chumash*, the Book of Prophets, and so forth. I was attentive because the Bible stories appealed to me; however as a teacher he was very weak, lost his temper easily and beat us mercilessly for the most trivial reasons. We were never allowed to play or run about as boys are inclined to do. He was always worried and let his anxious anger out on us. I don't recall that he ever hit us with his bare hand; it seemed he didn't want to defile it on us.

Right after our afternoon snack the *rebbe* would remove his leather belt and keep it at the ready on the table until it was time for afternoon prayers. He also kept a special stick on the table – a piece of driftwood which he had brought back from the annual fair in Shat [Šeta] where he would visit his family each year.

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[78] A feature of Litvak Yiddish was a tendency to pronounce the letter "shin" like an "s."

[79] A *treybetsh* is a butcher who removes unclean veins and fat from meat to make it kosher.

[80] The Five Books of Moses, or Pentateuch.

I can definitely say that the worst beating he ever gave me was for making a soldier's cap out of paper, which I gave to one of my classmates, who put it on his head. One summer day I made little boats out of paper and sailed them near the edge of the river between afternoon and evening prayers. The beating I received as a result was so merciless that I now wonder that I didn't get sick.

The *rebbe's* wife, Dvora, was a so-called "market lady:" She would seek out bargains on Thursdays and resell them to housewives who didn't have time to go to market themselves, or didn't have her negotiating skills with the peasants. She would also buy geese, ducks and chickens, take them to the kosher butcher to be killed, pluck the feathers, cut them up, and deliver the pieces to her regular customers' homes. She kept the giblets for herself for Sabbath and even ate them during the week. Every evening she was busy pulling feathers, and every Thursday evening she could be seen dragging geese and ducks home from the slaughterhouse, their heads bloodying the streets as she pulled them home by their feet.

One Thursday evening I found a windpipe that Dvora had removed from a goose. I planned to blow it like a trumpet on my way home. By accident it made a sound in class. The *rebbe* responded immediately with his stick, and took away the windpipe.

We did receive one privilege near the end of the term. After the fair was over in Shat, entertainers from there would come to Keidan and set up a show-tent in the middle of our marketplace, where they gave performances. They also stretched a rope from one side of the market to the other for a girl from their troupe to walk on. This the *rebbe* would let us watch, because he didn't want to miss it himself. He used to stand with us at the end of the street until one of the players came up to him with a drum or a cap, asking for a coin...

During the last term in this *cheder* I studied the Talmud book "*Baba Kama*" and also began to learn to write. My writing teacher was Chaim Aharon, a tall, handsome man with a long grey beard. He always dressed smartly dressed and his *cheder*, which consisted of two rooms at the beginning of Smilga Street, was as clean as possible, given the circumstances.

He charged a total of ten *kopecks* a week, and he had so many students that there was hardly a place to sit down. My assigned time with him was between 8 and 9 in the morning and I often had to wait for a place to sit. The tumult in the classroom was overwhelming: One student would yell, "Reb Chaim Aharon, let me do this over!" Another: "Reb Chaim Aharon, show me how to write this!" A third: "Reb Chaim Aharon, write out 'God's help' for me!"

He tried to satisfy everyone, and never showed the least sign of impatience or annoyance as he gave out sheets of paper with big letters for the children to trace over in ink, distributed penmanship models to be copied, or demonstrated how to write "God's help" beautifully.

His own penmanship was remarkable. When he inscribed a closing salutation he would twist his pen around the paper for several seconds, and the result was a gorgeous peacock's tail or the outline of a stork or a swan.

4.

I was about 10 years old when I began to study with Ortsik Berl Fradkes.

I was sent to his *cheder* because he prayed in the gravediggers' synagogue, where he also taught a daily Talmud lesson after prayers, and my father prayed there on the afternoons of the high holidays.

This teacher was very pious and was more concerned with our prayers than with our studies. More to the point, he would beat us more for being remiss in prayers than for neglecting our studies. He would stick his bony fingers into my armpit and shout: You, so and so! Get to your afternoon prayers!" When he prayed or said grace or made any other blessing he had the habit of repeating the same words several times. The first time I heard him do this in a strange singsong when reciting the prayer after bodily elimination, I burst out laughing, and got a nice beating for it.

On another occasion he thrashed me for sliding on the ice in the idiot Malke's yard on the way home. I was told on by another *cheder* boy, Shmuel Zelke, who was four or five years older than me, and who had himself talked me into sliding there.

I revolted and refused to return to that *cheder*.

My next teacher was Moshe the *treybetsh's* son-in-law. I felt quite different in his class. He usually treated us as equals and often told us stories from the Bible and Talmud, posed riddles for us and sometimes in summer would go swimming with us on a free day. I can say for sure that I got the most out of studying with him.

My last *rebbe* was Reb Yekel, with whom we studied the Talmudic laws of marriage. When we began the chapter about widowed and divorced women, he explained the details clearly, without assuming we were already steeped in medieval commentary. He talked to us in a manner suitable for adults, rather than 13-year-old boys... One day in class, out of boredom, I was playing with a bottle of quicksilver I had bought, with which I intended to try to coat copper coins. I dropped the bottle under the table and then crawled under, trying to gather together the elusive balls...

For the remaining time before we moved to Warsaw I studied with Moshe Shmere Lichtman, and I feel fortunate to see him, a fellow toiler, still among us.

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Economics and Social Life
כלכלה וחיי חברה

Agriculture, Industry and Trade in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor book, pp 119-123.*

Israel Libenzon

Translated by Miriam Erez

There were Jews in Keidan as early as the 15th century. Keidan attracted traders mainly owing to its big annual fair. From that time, the number of Jews increased from year to year, and the community began to organize itself. But in 1495[81], a decree was issued by the Grand Prince Alexander that all Jews had to leave Lithuania and leave all their property behind. In 1503, Alexander issued a new decree permitting the Jews to return and reclaim their property.

In 1590, Keidan obtained Magdeburg rights, granting it autonomy and self-rule. Commerce began to flourish in the town, in no small measure thanks to the Jews. By this time, fairs were held three times a year. Prince Radziwill (17th century) wanted to increase the Jewish population of Keidan in order to develop trade, and granted the Jews full civil rights and religious freedom. It is believed that Jews who had been exiled from Scotland came to Keidan, among them many weavers, who developed the weaving handicraft there. By the beginning of the 19th century, the weaving trade was entirely in Jewish hands. Prince Radziwill had allocated the Jews their own quarter, where they could develop various handicrafts. Jewish experts in various professions were a source of pride for Radziwill.

In 1646, Radziwill built the first windmill and leased it to the Jews. In 1650, a printing house was established in Keidan; a paper mill had been established a few years prior. Among others, the printing house published the first Book of Psalms in the Lithuanian language. My sources do not specify whether the Jews had a part in these industries.

The Jewish tradespeople in Keidan were organized into guilds, as were the non-Jews. In 1652 Radziwill issued a decree requiring Jewish butchers, slaughterers and traders in beef cattle to form a guild. In addition, the Jews were authorized to collect debts from Christians by selling their debtors' homes, in the event that the debtors' belongings did not cover their debts.

By the second half of the 17th century, the Jews occupied an important place in the economy of Keidan. They were engaged mainly in the wine trade, in import and export, in farming, in miscellaneous businesses and in moneylending. The honey industry in Keidan, which was developed by Jews, became famous throughout Lithuania and Poland.

In 1659, the first bridge over the Neviazhe (Nevežis) was built, and the business of collecting tolls for crossing it was leased to a Jew. Boguslaw Radziwill, who spent most of his time outside Keidan, leased all his Keidan holdings to the Jews. In 1665, he leased the palace, the grounds, and a large portion of the income to a Jew by the name of Wolf Isakovich.

Judging from the per-capita tax, we can learn that the economic situation of the Keidan Jewish community at the beginning of the 18th century was quite good, ranking third in Lithuania, and by far surpassing even those of Vilna and Minsk.

In 1804, the Russian Czar Alexander I issued an order to expel Jews from the villages. At that time, many unemployed village Jews came to Keidan. As a result of this exile, the number of tavern owners and shopkeepers in Keidan multiplied, and the former villagers began engaging in fruit and vegetable farming on leased lands, selling their produce in the

[81] Dates in original Hebrew text are incorrectly given as 1595 and 1603.

surrounding area.

In 1868, the Russians placed two artillery batteries in Keidan, creating an income source for shopkeepers and tradesmen. A rail line that was built then also contributed to the economic development of the city.

With the government's assumption of a monopoly on alcohol in 1897, the taverns in Keidan, all but one of which had been run by Jews, were closed, leaving their owners without livelihoods.

Between 1900 and the exile in 1915, and from the end of World War I, when the exiled returned home, Keidan's Jews engaged in the aforementioned occupations. A dividing line cannot be drawn between the pre- and post-war periods, as after the war, most people returned to their previous occupations.

Agriculture

Keidan was known regionally and throughout Lithuania for its cucumbers. The families Landsberg, Even, Kagan and others grew cucumbers and other vegetables on large plots in and around Keidan. In 1931 Dr. S. Sapìr, then manager of the Jewish People's Bank, published a study on agriculture in Keidan in the *Yiddish Voice* in Kovno. According to this study, about 70 families were engaged in growing cucumbers and other vegetables, of whom 21 engaged solely in agriculture, 23 engaged mainly in agriculture, and 24 engaged in it as a side income.

The area used for growing cucumbers and other produce changed from year to year. In 1929, it occupied 83 hectares [205 acres]; in 1930, 105 hectares [259 acres]; and in 1931, 160 hectares [395 acres]. Note that the area used to grow cucumbers and other vegetables in the whole of Lithuania (except for Kovno) was only 500-600 hectares total. Therefore, the area of the Keidan growers constituted about a quarter of all of Lithuania's vegetable-producing land. About 92% of it was used for growing cucumbers, and the rest for tomatoes and other vegetables. Only a small percentage of this land was owned by the growers; most was leased from estate owners or from other area farmers.

Keidan cucumbers were sold in the large urban markets throughout Lithuania, including those of Memel [Klaipėda], Shavel [Šiauliai], Telz [Telšiai], Janishok [Joniškis], Rakishok [Rokiškis], and Krottingen [Kretinga]. Before World War I, Keidan cucumbers were also shipped to Riga and Libau [Liepaja], Latvia. The unit of sale was known as a *shok*, equal to 60 cucumbers. The cucumber season lasted only 4-5 months, during which growers employed about 700 male and female workers for the harvest, in addition to wagon drivers for delivery to market.

Trade

Relatively large wholesalers operated in Keidan in the following industries:

1. Foodstuffs, or colonial merchandise, as this industry was referred to in those times. Sugar and salt were imported by the rail carload from the Ukraine; and herring from England and Norway. The main consumers of this merchandise were the villagers and their cooperatives. Note that this business of colonial merchandise was managed by Keidan merchants on a large scale, and it sometimes was economical for merchants in Ponevezh [Panevėžys], Raseyn [Raseiniai], Yanova [Jonava], and even Shavel [Šiauliai] to purchase it from Keidan wholesalers instead of importing it directly from the source.

   An incident connected to a shipment of sugar from Keidan to merchants in Raseyn during World War I, which could have ended tragically. A few days before the [Jewish] exile in 1915, the Germans seized some wagons bringing sugar to Raseyn. The Russians accused the cargo owners, Yosef Wolpert and Associates, of shipping foodstuffs to the Germans. Wolpert and his family hurried out of town even before the exile, as the Russians threatened to hang him as a traitor.

   The main businesses in the foodstuffs industry were owned by Yosef Wolpert and

Associates, founded at the close of the 19th century by Reb Leizer Wolpert, a learned man and admirer of Theodor Herzl, and his son, Yosef. Zalman Frank was a partner in this business; and Feingold, who in addition to his textile business, was a big sugar wholesaler. Other major wholesalers in this business were Yaakov Wolpert and Yosef Blumzon.

2. Petroleum products – About 15 Jews were partners in a large depot of petroleum products such as kerosene, heavy fuel oil, and gasoline, located at Keidan's train station. As many as 20 rail tanks of petroleum imported from Russia could be stored at the depot, which supplied petroleum to the entire area, including surrounding towns.

3. Haberdashery – The main wholesalers in this industry were Upnitzky-Wolpert and Yosef Lichtenstein.

4. Textiles – The Ginzburg brothers and Tzipe Greenhaus

Grain merchants
Wheat, rye, and oats were grown successfully on plots around Keidan, and the trade there was almost entirely in Jewish hands. From 1932 to 1940, Dov Toker coordinated grain exports, mainly that of clover seed from around Keidan, which was in great demand in many countries. Other grain merchants were Michael and Abba Friedland, Zang, and Tzadok Shlapobersky.

Poultry export
The export of poultry — chickens, turkeys, and mainly geese to Germany for Christmas — was also concentrated in Jewish hands.

Rawhide and rag export
Zundel Ginzburg was a major exporter of these.

Apple exports
Keidan's Jews were also active in apple exports.

Industry in Keidan

Before World War I and between the two world wars, there were many factories and workshops in Keidan. The most important ones were:

Tanning
Brothers Moshe-Ze'ev and Eliyahu-Dov Kagan had a tanning factory and sold leather goods, employing about 100 workers. Their products were sold in Russia.
Benyamin Bavilsky, tannery workshop, employed about 20 workers, as did Miller, a German.

Furriers
The Winik brothers ran the "Vilkas" furriery.

Flour mills
The Shlapobersky brothers had a steam-powered flour mill, later passed on to the Gel brothers.

Goldin ran a hydro-powered mill, leased from Count Totleben for many years until the Holocaust.

Yitzhak Stung & Miller, and thereafter Shisiansky, ran the mill at Vilein [Vilainiai], Count Totleben's estate.

Radzevičius, a Lithuanian, ran a diesel-powered electric power station and flour mill, against whom a suit was brought for setting the Vilein mill on fire to harm his competitor, for which he was sentenced to several years in prison.

Sawmills
Gel Brothers, log cutting and lumber milling

Printers
Movshovitz & Kagan

Vintners
Israelov, wines produced from apples and other fruits

Candy
Zalman Lifshitz, Melnik, Levin

Bakeries
Tuber and others

Blacksmiths and carriage makers
Shlapobersky

Fired bricks
Benyamin Bavilsky brickworks

Cucumbers and sauerkraut
Smilg, Tzadok Shlapobersky, and others were involved in producing these from vegetables grown in Keidan.

Matzo
Keidan had one mechanically operated matzo factory.
Other workshops

Keidan also had carpentries, upholsterers, saddleries and other workshops.

Banks

People's Bank (Folksbank)
The People's Bank was established in Keidan after World War I, about 1921, by the Association of People's Banks in Lithuania. In the years 1928-1934, Dr. S. Sapìr served as manager, and according to his memory the bank had about 500 members. The bank served as an important source of funding, particularly for ordinary people – cucumber growers, craftsmen and small business owners. No details concerning its balance sheet or the scope or its activities have remained.

In 1926-27, a group of business owners headed by Zundel Gurvich established a mutual aid bank. Its members were mostly active Zionists. No Keidaners currently in Israel have any information on the activities of this bank.

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Volunteer Firefighters in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 124-125.*

Chaim Landsberg

Translated by Miriam Erez

The Volunteer Fire Brigade was one of the most popular institutions in town. From the mid-1930s, Tzadok Shlapobersky headed it, and his main deputies were adjutant T. Yaffe and head officer Shmuel Landsberg. The three of them together made up the headquarters command. The brigade was divided into platoons, each commanded by a deputy officer. Different officers and deputies were responsible for 1 - inventory; 2 - machines; 3 - water barrels; 4 - ladders; 5 - auxiliary gear. There was also an officer responsible for drills and a sergeant major.

The brigade had between 50 and 60 volunteers, but in times of need they would draft other citizens of the town for unskilled work. There was one permanent full-time employee who resided at the fire station, cared for the two horses, monitored the telephone, cleaned and kept the station orderly and maintained all the firefighting gear in sound condition. When there was a need for repairs, he notified the inventory deputy, who took care of it.

Near the headquarters was the office of a public committee that helped to raise money. Where did the money come from? The municipality paid the permanent full-time employee, and homeowners paid a monthly tax. The city also gave firefighters the right to collect fees for stationing carts in the market. Any surplus in the market maintenance budget was also given to the firefighters, to compensate them for keeping the markets clean.

The market cleaning was done by a subcontractor, leaving a nice profit. The fee collection was to be carried out by the subcontractors' cleaning workers, but as they didn't complete the task on time, the rest was done by firefighters for pay.

How were the homeowners' fees collected? Obviously, it wasn't easy, as a large portion of them didn't want to pay, and others were willing but lacked the means. Only a few homeowners paid voluntarily. So the firefighters used a quite creative solution: The houses of those who had the means yet were unwilling to pay were subject to "maneuvers," which could be carried out politely and smoothly, or not: The firefighters would spill some water inside the house, or slightly damage the roof, or smash a few windows, and so on, and this would help. It was enough to start a rumor that the following week a "maneuver" would be held at a few houses whose owners had not paid their taxes, and the money would flow like water. The homeowners were persuaded that it was cheaper to pay up than to withhold.

This all began in 1930. Until then, Keidan's firefighting situation was bad, and the equipment outdated. When financial conditions improved, new equipment was purchased, yet the transition to the modern equipment wasn't easy. A large, advanced machine was purchased that had to be operated manually. Eight people had to operate its pumps, and exert great physical effort to achieve sufficiently strong water pressure.

In 1930, the news began to spread that the fascists wanted to burn down an entire quarter of the city, Smilga Street, because they disliked its small houses set close together, which they considered an eyesore. The firefighters realized that if a fire broke out here, they would not be able to control it with their primitive equipment, and they decided to purchase a motor. Immediately upon the motor's arrival, a fire broke out, which they were able to extinguish quickly and without undue effort.

Water wasn't a problem, with the Neviazhe (Nevežis) on one side, and the Smilga on the other. They placed the motor beside the river — the center of the fire was about 500 meters away — and the motor transferred the water quickly, as there were enough hoses reaching from the river to the blaze. After the first machine proved a success, another was purchased.

How did they move all the fire-extinguishing equipment to the site of the fire? Upon sounding the alarm, the permanent fire station employee would go out first with a machine to which a water tank was attached. The wagon drivers would unhitch their horses in the middle of the

street, leave their wagon and ride their horses to join the fire brigade. Other firefighters who were at home at the time of the fire would do the same. Naturally, those who lived close by would arrive soonest. The deputies would prepare the equipment such as water barrels, extinguishers, wagons with ladders and the various tools for breaking in. It would take between 5 and 15 minutes to reach the site of the fire.

The firefighters' devotion and self-sacrifice went above and beyond the call of duty: None thought of becoming injured or burned, and all work was done on a voluntary basis. Note that nearly all of Keidan's firefighters were Jews, who worked to put out all fires — those of Jews and gentiles alike – with equal loyalty.

What did they get in exchange for all their hard work and preparation? Once a year there was a firefighters' ball, featuring refreshments and food fit for a king, to which each firefighter could bring his wife or girlfriend. Following the banquet there was dancing until dawn. The firefighters also received free entry to the cinema, other balls and theatrical performances, all in an orderly fashion, according to rank and assignment in the brigade.

The fire of 1914

In 1914, a major fire broke out in Keidan that spread over half of the city. While I was but a small boy, the event has remained in my memory. People came to help fight the fire from surrounding towns, by train and in wagons, and there was pandemonium. Nearly all the town's inhabitants had already packed their bundles, ready to abandon their homes. My family did the same, as we lived just about 200 meters from the fire.

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Memories

זכרונות

Lithuania's Refugees in Exile *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp. 129-134*

Pesach Weitzer-Chittin, Kibbutz Beit Zera

Published in "The Past," a quarterly chronicle of Jews and Judaism in Russia, vol. 13. Tel Aviv, Iyar 1966.

Translated by Miriam Erez

1.

Over 50 years have passed since the event I describe here, which I can see in my mind's eye as clearly as if it took place yesterday.

It was the beginning of May 1915, nine months after the outbreak of the World War I. The Russian army had suffered serious defeats, and it was no wonder: First, while the Germans prepared intensively for the war, the Russians were preoccupied for several years with the Beilis case and with enacting all sorts of laws to make Jews' lives miserable. Second, a shameful treachery there began with the Russian queen, who was of German descent; the corrupt monk Rasputin; Foreign Minister Shturmer; General Paul von Rennenkampf; and ended with the high Russian administration that struggled to undermine the civil and military regime. Naturally they had to find a scapegoat, and it was easy for the reactionary Russian government to blame the Jews for all the disasters that befell the Russian army. At the same time, the government staged a military trial against innocent Jewish vendors, (one of whom was named Feldberg, I believe) who had traded with Germans since before the war. The court convicted them of spying and condemned them to death.

At the time, the Jewish population of the Kovno district, which bordered on Germany, was in a bad condition politically and economically. Trade was nearly paralyzed, and exiting the cities and small towns was dangerous. As the German army began its major offensive, we were residing in Keidan, 50 kilometers from Kovno. The Russian army would go in and out of our town. Fortunately for us, the soldiers behaved themselves well enough toward the Jews. In our home, for instance, five Cossacks were housed for a few weeks, and relations between us were good. We didn't hear of any incidents between the army and the Jewish residents. I won't say that relations were ideal everywhere; we heard of difficult incidents involving Jews in some places. In any event, we lived as if under siege.

On the afternoon of Sunday May 3, 1915, two days before Shavuot, posters were put up on the streets of our town (population 3,000) in the name of the head commander of the Russian army, Nikolai Nikolaevich, uncle of the tsar, and General Yanushkevich, of Polish descent, announcing that all Kovno district Jews had to leave the district within 48 hours because of their disloyalty to the state.

It is hard to describe the situation in which we found ourselves. We were in shock. We didn't know where to go. Rumors began that the government was providing trains for the deportees on the Libau-Romny line, which passed two kilometers from our town. The Jews began packing their possessions. Some decided to go by horse and wagon, and ran to rent carts from local farmers to carry their goods. Notably, there was no restriction on the amount of property that could be taken away. Meanwhile Jews from the surrounding area began arriving, and the situation deteriorated. Looking at them, we thought to ourselves, "That's us a day from now."

On Monday, May 4, the exodus began. People bid each other farewell almost wordlessly. It was hard to speak. They thought to themselves, "Who knows if we'll see each other again?" My parents, of blessed memory, decided we'd go by train. On our last night in Keidan, we slept on our bundles, as cannon fire shook the walls of our house.

At dawn, we loaded our belongings onto a cart and started for the train station. Every once in a while, we turned back to look at our town, from which we were being banished. The town was nearly empty.

We arrived at the station at five o'clock. That long summer day, which began at five in the morning and didn't end until eight in the evening, is engraved in my memory. By the time we arrived, dozens of families were already waiting. Trains full of soldiers came frequently, heading in the direction of Shavl [Šiauliai]. From time to time the station manager would promise to arrange a train for us presently, but these were empty promises.

Meanwhile a few hundred Jews gathered in the station square. Time stretched out. We were miserable. We crowded together and waited. Suddenly a coach arrived from which emerged a military man with the rank of *polkovnik* [colonel]— a Jewish military physician. He approached and asked why we were gathered there. We told him that we were being exiled.

"Why?" he asked. "Because we're Jews," we replied. He nodded and exclaimed angrily, "I risk my head for them, and they exile my brothers!" There were tears in his eyes, as there were in the eyes of the Jews looking on.

So it went until seven-thirty that night. We despaired. We knew we were allowed to be there no more than another hour, and if they didn't provide us a train, we risked being forced to leave the Kovno district on foot. So we organized a delegation to explain our difficult situation to the station manager. We begged him to arrange a train for us. This time he promised, and kept his word. The soldiers were taken off the next train to come through, and we were allowed to board. There were elderly and little ones among us. We began hastily throwing our bundles on to the wagons, however we could.

By the time we all boarded, the sun had set. Finally the train began moving. We remembered that it was Shavuot eve, and began praying *ma'ariv* [evening prayers] in tear-filled voices. We recalled Shavuots of times past. It was a short holiday, but an enjoyable one, with summery weather and a green landscape. Distress filled our hearts as we looked toward an unknown future. Someone took out a bottle of wine and we blessed it, but without chanting the traditional tune, which could always be heard emanating from the houses of Jews, wherever they were. Quite a few of us secretly shed tears.

After a long day of tense waiting, tired people began to doze off. They awoke at dawn, when the train arrived in Vilna, where the Jewish community received us warmly. The Jews of Vilna, who had been informed of our fate, had organized care for the refugees in advance. They brought us hot food, drink, and cigarettes, and didn't even forget candy for the children. This warm reception brightened our spirits somewhat; we gained a little strength. We felt the Jewish heart reaching out to fellow Jews in trouble.

There were some among us who wanted to get off in Vilna, but the authorities did not permit it. Vilna was teeming with refugees; there was no more room. So we stayed on the train and kept going. The following day, the second day of Shavuot, we arrived in Minsk. Once again, the Jewish community rose and came out in droves to greet the refugees, to bring us food and other supplies, and to encourage us.

Our train had about 30 freight cars full of men, women, and children. On Friday, May 8, we arrived in Homel [Gomel]. The train parked on a side rail between freight trains, far from the station. I recall getting off to get water. Quite far away we found a boiler full of hot water, from which we filled a bucket and hurried back to our car. On the way, we encountered a station worker who grabbed the bucket, poured out the water, and went so far as to chastise us. It was then that we recalled the pogroms that had taken place in this town in 1905.

From Homel we continued on to Bakhmach [Ukraine], where it emerged that according to the plan (if indeed there was one), we were supposed to have moved to another track at Homel.

In any case, we arrived in Bakhmach on the Sabbath. Remembering the Sabbath back home was heartrending. A few frightened Jews from the surrounding area came by with food. They couldn't grasp our situation: They shook their heads, unable to help us.

We ultimately went back to Homel, and after a few hours more, reached Unecha station, alongside which was a hamlet by the same name. While we were tired from the journey, the concern and devotion of the Jews of this small town lifted our spirits. They helped us unload our belongings and move them together to one place, as we were supposed to transfer to another train to go elsewhere. When I recall, years later, how the Jews of Unecha, who in number were about a third of our group of refugees, divided us up amongst themselves and attended to all our needs, I have no words to thank them.

My family was housed with the rabbi's family, the Margolins. The rabbi himself wasn't there; he had left before the war for the United States to serve as a rabbi there, remained there because of the war and had not been able to return. In any event, we enjoyed the Margolins' warm hospitality very much. Only once in my life since then have I had the pleasure of by chance meeting a Jew from Unecha, and I was quite excited — it was like meeting a brother. We stayed in Unecha for three days. From there we were taken on a narrow train line to Starodub, in the Chernigov district, where we were supposed to remain for the duration of the war.

In Starodub, the local committee for Jewish war refugees had already organized, as they had already been in close touch with the central committee of YEKOPO (Jewish Relief Committee for War Victims) in Petrograd, with the regional committee in Kiev, with ORT, AFA, OZE, etc. The Russian government also extended aid to the refugees in the form of, I believe, 15 kopeks per day. But most of the monetary aid and the actual work was done by the Jewish associations and organizations in Russia, whose names should be imprinted in the minds of every Jew for their generous assistance and heartfelt concern for the Jewish war refugees.
At first we stayed in the synagogue in Starodub, and the local Jews did their utmost to alleviate our situation: They rented us apartments, found us work, and put the children into *cheders* and schools. We stayed in Starodub, where we got into the routine of normal life, for three and a half months. I particularly recall an extended family by the name of Lokshin, who worked hard for the refugees' benefit, along with the rest of the community. Relations between the local Jews and the refugees were very warm.

2.
Yet our wandering hadn't yet come to an end. A week before Rosh Hashana 1915, we were notified that we were being sent farther into the vast Russian interior. Again we took up our walking sticks, packed our belongings and prepared to move. They took us back to Unecha on Rosh Hashana eve. Like Shavuot eve that same year, we were loaded along with our belongings onto freight cars and transported in the direction of Moscow. We spent the days of Rosh Hashana in the forests of Bryansk, far from any Jewish communities. The train moved slowly, passing only three to four stations a day. En route a train passed us transporting army recruits, who abused us. They went so far as to throw chunks of burning wood into our cars.
We reached Moscow two days before Yom Kippur. We stayed in Moscow one day; the next day we reached Vorobyovy-Gory, where they changed our route: Instead of Nizhny-Novgorod, they pointed us in the direction of Tsaritsyn[82], in the Saratov district.

I want to note here the generosity of the ordinary Russian worker: We'd sat in the cars for a few hours, ready to go, until about an hour before sunset on Yom Kippur eve. My sister and another refugee decided to go out and buy something for the final meal before the fast. They looked around and lingered a bit. Meanwhile the engineer came and announced that in a few minutes, the train would depart. Panic took over our car, the fourth from the engine. My mother, of blessed memory, began to cry bitterly. The engineer heard her and came back to

[82]Later Stalingrad, now Volgograd.

ask what the matter was. We explained to him that my sister and another passenger had gone to buy something to eat. I still remember his words: "Calm down. I'll delay our departure for ten minutes." During the delay, they returned. We were so grateful to the kind engineer. Apparently to make up for the lost ten minutes, he drove fast to our next destination, making only short stops at each station.

At exactly sunset, as the People of Israel were gathering in synagogues for Kol Nidre, the holiest of prayers, the train began to move. It's hard to describe our mood as we all stood in the train car (a police officer, representing the authorities, was also in our car, actually a quiet fellow), wrapped in prayer shawls, each of us chanting the traditional prayer, heartbroken and through choked-back tears.

This time the train moved rapidly, and the following day, just as Yom Kippur ended, we reached Kozlov [now Michurinsk]. Apparently Kozlov's Jews had been notified in advance of our impending arrival, because they greeted us warmly: They brought us food, hot water, and most important, a very warm welcome. From there we continued, passing through the Don river area. In the morning, two days before Succot, we arrived in Tsaritsyn.

I recall stopping on the way to Tsaritsyn, I believe, at Paramonovo station. We got off the train and I saw from a distance an old, pleasant-looking Cossack standing next to an old Jewish refugee, his head uncovered, massaging the Jew's temples. While I actually realized what was going on, I approached them and asked the Cossack with a smile, "What are you looking for there?"

"Horns," the Cossack replied. "We've been told that Jews have horns on the head."

"Nu? And did you find any?"

"No," he replied with a smile. "His head is just like mine."

The refugee committee of the Tsaritsyn Jewish community welcomed us with open arms and extraordinary warmth. They themselves helped transfer our belongings from the train to carts, took us into town, and immediately moved us into homes and rented halls. At first we were housed in shared apartments. They arranged work, established an elementary school for children, and enrolled a number of teenagers in gymnasiums. We found in our hosts a warm Jewish heart and willingness to help with everything.

On Succot eve, a few of us were invited to the *sukkah* of a prominent community member named Ratner. It was said of him that he had greatly assisted in purchasing land in Eretz-Israel for emigrants from Tsaritsyn. Tsaritsyn had a splendid synagogue, and on Simchat Torah, we were surprised to see a high-ranking army officer there dancing with a Torah scroll in his hands. When we asked who he was, we were told that he was a Jewish physician, Dr. Shapira by name, the son-in-law of Ratner and a member of Tsaritsyn's Zionist committee. By the way, Dr. Shapira later made *aliya* to Israel and practiced as a surgeon at Hadassah Hospital in Tel Aviv.

I have to say something about the socioeconomic status of Russian Jews on the other side of the Pale of Settlement. First of all, their numbers were small relative to the rest of the population, and they were either offspring of Nikolai I's soldiers[83] (the fourth or fifth generation), or holders of academic degrees, or tradespeople of the first guild. Their economic status was very good, and they were highly respected by the local gentiles. In the three years that we spent in Tsaritsyn, we didn't witness a single anti-Semitic incident.

[83] Under Tsar Nikolai I, (1825-1855) Jewish males could be drafted as young as 12 to serve for 25 years in the Russian army. After discharge they were permitted to live outside the Pale of Settlement.

Most of the Jewish inhabitants were of Ukrainian or White Russian descent, with a few from Lithuania and Poland. As I mentioned, even before our arrival, there had been a branch of the Zionist movement there headed by a Dr. Vilensky, an ardent Zionist with a warm Jewish heart. Other prominent Tsaritsyn Jews I recall are Dr. Slabotsky, who fought in the Russo-Japanese war; a nice-looking Jew, unpretentious and the owner of a golden heart; Dr. Tager; Dr. Chefetz; Dr. Bolitansky; Dr. Maskilaitin; Tzipkin the pharmacist; Shpont the chemical engineer, whose eldest son returned from Eretz Israel in 1914 and headed the local Young Zionists branch; Falkovich the engineer; Dubrovsky the teacher, a course director from Grodno who ran a Hebrew speakers' group; and many, many more whom it's now difficult for me to remember.

Tsaritsyn's Jews helped us a lot to get through the war years. We never dreamed that in the distant reaches of Russia, far from the Pale of Settlement, we'd find Jews with strong national consciousness and hearts of gold. Afterward, whenever we'd meet Jewish refugees from other cities in Russia, we discovered that everywhere, no matter how far from the Pale, there were Jews with sensitive hearts who extended themselves to help their brothers in times of distress with boundless loyalty and devotion.

I'd like to recount one incident: At the beginning of 1916, the Tsaritsyn refugee committee found itself in a financial crisis; it had not received its government allowance on time. This information reached two Jewish brothers who had converted to Christianity, and who owned a large watch and gold jewelry store. I recall their names, but I'd rather not say them here. Apparently their consciences tormented them, and they sent a few thousand rubles (a large sum in those days) to the refugee committee. But when it came up at a committee meeting, Dr. Vilensky rose and said in an agitated voice, "We must return this money immediately. We can't take a kopek from those who have left us!" On the spot, within a few minutes, the required sum was collected and returned to the donors.

Over time we became acclimated to Tsaritsyn: We worked, joined political parties, mainly Zionist, and joined many societies. Jewish music ensembles, singers, orators, and lecturers started to arrive. The local Jews were an enthusiastic audience, reminiscing afterwards about the genuine Jewish culture and life that had been forgotten in their hearts. The refugees got along well financially, and their relations with the local Jews were always warm.

The revolution took place in February 1917. In October of that same year, the communists took over. Because of the war and these events, the economic situation began to deteriorate. By 1918 we were experiencing the start of the crisis in Russian Jewry. As an urban element, the Jews felt the economic crisis most intensely. Russia signed a peace treaty with Germany. Little by little, the refugees began making their way back to Lithuania.

Fifty years have passed since that sad event – the exile of Kovno district Jews. Yet, along with the troubles that befell us because of the war, we will always remember with love and admiration the generous and warmhearted aid, the brotherly help extended to us by the glorious Russian Jewish community.

One thought often comes to mind: How much could idealistic Russian Jewry have contributed to building the State of Israel, if we take into account that this community played a major part in laying the foundation of Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel? The thought breaks the heart. Nevertheless I hope (and subconsciously believe) that Russian Jewry is yet destined to occupy a place of honor in building our new country.

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Keidan in the Time of Troubles *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 135-140*

Shabtiel Deitsh (Haifa)

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Even though I wasn't born, didn't grow up and didn't study in Keidan, it seems to me that I have the right to write about it, as well as a lot to say. Not only am I personally connected to Keidan, but so are all my family members, due to the great sorrow and suffering around the "Kibush" training farm at Pelednagiai.

In all the terrible world events of the 20th century, the Jews suffered more than any other nation. During the First World War, hundreds of thousands of families were uprooted; their possessions, acquired over centuries, were plundered in a few hours, and the survivors were scattered in all directions. But the greatest horrors in mankind's history were committed in Hitler's time, when six million Jewish souls were brutally annihilated. Those in Keidan were among them.

During the first time of troubles, my family and I lived in Vilna. In that time, when Jews were expelled from hundreds of Lithuanian towns and villages and scattered to all corners of the Russian empire, tens of thousands poured into Vilna. The city was in crisis: There was little bread, and no flour at all. Salt was extremely expensive and could only be purchased with gold. The farmers brought sacks of potatoes from the villages and exchanged them for pianos. Many Jews wandered the streets hungry and swollen. I encountered scenes like this at every turn.

When the situation calmed down slightly, I decided to move to Keidan. The family of Chaim Berel Srolov, relatives of my late wife, lived there. When the Germans gave some refugees permission to return to their towns, I seized the opportunity. The first problem there was finding a way to survive. I was attracted to Count Totleben's fields, which lay between his palace and Keidan, because I had previously been a farmer. Though the war still raged, the situation had begun to improve somewhat, as peace neared between the Bolsheviks and the Germans.

Jews began to return from Vilna and elsewhere in Russia, but they were hungry and desolate. Many Jewish families, who had previously grown vegetables, mainly cucumbers, had no land to till, and they were dying from hunger. The thought of the beautiful, rich soil lying between Count Totleben's palace, the railway station and the town gave me no rest, and I decided to approach the count himself about the situation. I requested and was granted a meeting.

To my great joy, there appeared before me a person of outstanding positive qualities. From the first, our conversation was friendly and humane. I poured out my heart about the situation and even dared to demand, that, as the patron of Keidan, with great social and political influence, he should do as much as he could to help.

In a few hours we had become real friends. He even invited me into the chambers of his father, the great general who defended Sevastopol for Russia in the Crimean War, defeating the British, French and Turks. The rooms were partly filled with weaponry, new and ancient. I was particularly impressed by a very large painting that hung by itself on a wall, showing Tsar Nikolai II and the general, then his aide, riding on two mighty horses, amid beautiful scenery. The painting was glorious and apparently worth hundreds of thousands of rubles. The count was very proud of the painting, and selective about whom he allowed to see it.

Many of the counts, barons and other Russian aristocrats in the area had been impoverished, Totleben among them, giving them an incentive to make use of their lands. The count agreed to lease about 500 dunams [125 acres] of arable land, on easy terms for 20 years. This successful deal had great significance for the future. I eagerly gathered the local vegetable growers together and surprised them with the news, asking them to select a committee to subdivide the land and establish a growers' association.

The economic situation was dire, with high unemployment; the few remaining factories had been nearly destroyed by war and anarchy. The few community organizers were depressed and impoverished and there was no financial help. When it became known that I had made a deal with as important a figure as Totleben, and further that I had been a farmer in Eretz Israel and a long-term member of *Poalei Zion* in Vilna, I appeared to be a savior. The vegetable growers began tilling the soil with great enthusiasm. I asked the count for help obtaining horses and farming tools, which he gave.

However, time didn't stand still. The Poles occupied Vilna, where they organized pogroms against the Jews. They buried the author Weiter alive, on the outskirts of Vilna.[84] The poet Leib Jaffe was saved from death at the very last minute. Many Jews fled from Poland to Lithuania, and Lithuanian Jewish refugees began to return home, including well-known public figures. From America, Jewish *landsmanshaftn* began to send aid via Scandinavia to the Jews in Russia and particularly in the Baltic states. The Jews in Lithuania organized themselves and established the national *rat*, or council, a quasi-autonomous parliament. A new atmosphere of nationalism and Zionism began to grow. Kovno began to develop into an important Jewish center, and so did Keidan, which had had a significant name in the past.

Keidan recovered financially and socially and began to establish itself. Something special happened to it in the general progressive and social revolution. As I became active, and my success with the count gave me some recognition, I received an urgent invitation to meet with the Jewish national council. There I found public figures from all over Lithuania, as well as a senior official from the American Joint Distribution Committee, named Landesco[85], a smart and active Jew.

After discussing the general interests of the Lithuanian Jews, I invited Landesco to examine the particular situation of Jews in Keidan. He agreed. I described the Jewish population and conditions in the town, my thoughts and plans for its rehabilitation. My openness and honesty impressed him. He said: "Let us speak openly. I am a senior official of the Joint, but I can't take many decisions, particularly concerning finances. However, I have some advice for you. Make connections with the American *landsmanshaftn*. They have a lot of money but few plans. Knowledge of the situation and detailed plans will impress them. I have no money, but I do have influence and I promise you my help; if you do what I suggest you will succeed. I am impressed by you. Send them a detailed memorandum, as we discussed and send me a copy." And so we parted.

I returned to Keidan and here my problems started. It appeared my thoughts and plans were only in my mind. Here it was as if they had never happened, including my meeting with Landesco. I asked Zundel Ginzburg, the chairman of the communal committee, to call a special meeting. When I conveyed details of the program and my meeting with Landesco, some burst out laughing. Others, more practical, said I should be committed to an insane asylum. Indeed, I had asked the Americans for "only" a half million marks, a considerable sum even given the depreciated value of the currency at that time.

My situation was bad. I was a stranger in Keidan, no American Keidaner knew me, nor I them. A significant sum was under discussion and the authorization of the committee was a must. I was facing total defeat. Suddenly Zundel Ginzburg rose, and spoke with complete affection and support. He called out "What's the problem? What do we have to lose if the Americans refuse? Let them come here, and then I can't see how they could dare remain uninvolved!"

My suggestion was adopted unanimously. They all signed my letter and my plan for the rehabilitation of Keidan, and dispatched the letters. After three or four weeks, the committee,

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[84] Other sources say the Bundist writer Isaac Meyer Devenishki, who wrote under the name A. Weiter, was shot by Polish legionnaires.

[85] Alexander Landesco (1880-1963), a New York investment banker, was the Joint Distribution Committee's director of reconstruction in Eastern Europe after World War I.

represented by Zundel Ginzburg, received a check for 365,000 marks. Before we could get over the shock, a few weeks later we received an additional 85,000 marks.

Yet if anyone thinks this ended the matter, and that it was possible to finalize a plan for the rehabilitation of the destroyed Keidan, he understands neither the Jewish character nor the nature of those wild days. At that time, Bolshevik influence was widening and spreading. The Bolshevik plan was to destroy all communal committees that were under influence of Zionists, as well as those who supported them. Two youths, Finkelshtein and Marilinski, did all they could to destroy the communal committee and to attract the masses. The American money provided a good opportunity for this. A man, whose name I can't recall, stood at the head of a mob, demanding the money be divided among them. "The money was sent by our grandmothers and aunts for us, and not for the banks," they contended. They accepted no explanations: That children had no schools and no Talmud Torahs, that there were no buildings and no shops, that there was no credit and no aid – nothing helped. Blood was going to be spilled. The leader was an uneducated worker, and the intellectual teachers were the youths Finkelstein and Marilinski.

When German soldiers had first entered Keidan, I and Chaim Berel Srolov had followed close behind. It is difficult to describe the situation of Keidan at that time. The Russian army had expelled the Jews, then fled themselves. Before the Germans entered, the gentile inhabitants of the area had plundered everything: merchandise, furniture, utensils. They removed windows and doors, and took everything possible out of the houses. The black holes that remained made the buildings look like empty graves in the cemetery. Only lone German soldiers and starving dogs were visible in the streets.

It was not surprising in that situation that the arrival of so much money caused some to lose all sense of proportion. The town was in turmoil. Some wanted to rebuild. Some wanted the money divided among themselves, and some – typically the well off – were indifferent. One evening Ginzburg and I were invited to a meeting. When we arrived and Ginzburg saw the faces of the crowd, he said to me: "You conduct the meeting, I haven't the strength for such a mob!" Meanwhile my friends warned me that some in the crowd had filled their pockets with stones, and had decided to finish me off.

I opened the meeting with an attack: "Very honorable and organized assembly, I know you have decided to stone me with rocks. I ask you to leave a few stones also for Zundel Ginzburg. He is a decent man, a veteran communal worker, and such a decent man should be given his due. You, if you ever become communal workers, will receive nothing. Stones must be earned and you won't earn them. For this you require special privilege. Zundel Ginzburg and I have decided that, as long as we live, you will not get this money. Isn't that so, Mr. Ginzburg?" He stood up and called out, "Undeniably true!." I continued: "But I am prepared to make you an honest proposal: Choose three or five from among you to make decisions together with the communal committee, but those decisions will be final and without any protests."

They agreed. The committee decided eventually to build a school with a third of the money, to establish a bank for credit and loan assistance with another third, and to divide the remaining third among those most in need of loans and financial aid. This was almost identical to what I had suggested originally. With this I closed the meeting. However this whole affair robbed us both of any enthusiasm and creativity and we departed.

Ginzburg aged and grew weak. Along with our communal headaches, he was troubled by his young son, who had made an unsuitable marriage, and this led to his demise. In contrast, I was still young, active and dynamic.

I was elected to the Jewish national council. After a short while, my friends proposed to nominate me for the Lithuanian parliament, the *Seimas*. This was through Mr. Gorfinkel[86],

[86] Leyb Gorfinkel 1896-1976, advocate, journalist, and politician, vice chair of the Jewish National Council of Lithuania and member of Lithuanian Seimas in the 1920s.

who was also a representative to that body. In the meantime, the general situation of the Lithuanian Jews changed both for better and worse. The Jews of Lithuania began to experience freedom. With the country's new independence, former leaders and members of the intelligentsia began to get organized. Lithuania became a republic. The Jews established a national council and organized the communities. An international committee to aid the Jews of the Baltic States was founded In Stockholm, Sweden. At the same time, young people in Lithuania found themselves without trades, without employment, without purpose.

The situation was beyond desperate, and the organized Jewish bodies pressured me to do something. I decided to go my own way – to agriculture. I hurried back to Totleben, this time as an old friend, with a detailed plan. The land given to the nobility by the Russian tsar was in fact, a form of robbery, leaving the peasants in the status of tenant farmers. Their resentment of the nobility had grown, and the farmers hoped their lands would be returned to them when Lithuania became a republic.

Next to the estate of Vilain (Vilainiai) were the estate and the palace of Count Zabiela. He was an arrogant and wicked aristocrat and, it was said, also an antisemite. When he learned that his neighbors would be Jews, he wanted to destroy the whole world. A day after meeting with Totleben I received a note from him to come quickly. I felt disaster approaching. Word of the deal had spread rapidly. Count Zabiela, angry that he had not been consulted, was demanding that Totleben cancel the contract immediately, or he would sever all contact with him, tell his friends to shun him and incite the peasants who worked on all fourteen of his farms. In short, Zabiela would declare total war.

Totleben said he would return the 5,000 lit that he had received from me and pay an additional penalty of 5,000 lit. I explained to him, that ours was not just an agreement, but a legal right and a national duty, and I asked him for a postponement of a few days. I travelled to Kovno. A special meeting [of the national council] was called, where I explained the seriousness of the situation and asked for the authority to resolve it independently.

As there was no alternative, they agreed. I understood immediately that this was a time not for antagonism but rather for understanding, and that I would have to secure a different piece of land, even if it lacked the advantages of the one at Vilain. Within a short while, I was proved right. The wife of Count Totleben joined forces with Count Zabiela. Even though she was wicked and hated by the workers, the tenant farmers and the managers sided with her against me. That is why, when I suggested Pelednagiai I received it, with better conditions. Otherwise, something worse could have happened.

At that time, food was exceedingly expensive and I managed to buy a lot of potatoes from the neighboring farms. When I sent for wagons to cart them to the train, the former manager of Pelednagiai demanded I come to sign for the inventory myself. I suspected some danger and didn't go. Afterwards, it became known to me that there was a plot to murder me and so end this whole saga. After this, I found out that the main instigator of the plot was the priest from the big church on the other side of the river. I found out also, that every evening the priest used to come to Pelednagiai, gather the tenant farmers and tell them what to do and how to behave.

I took with me a few property owners, who were known to the priest, and went to negotiate him, but he held to his own opinion until I asked him if he held any official post. He said no. I then said to him, "and I am a member of the Seimas." This frightened him, and after that evening he stopped visiting the tenant farmers.

The matter of Pelednagiai settled down a bit, but elsewhere in the area things were boiling. I appealed to the national council to send to Keidan a famous and influential personality, who was also a renowned lawyer. They sent [Ozer] Finkelstein. In his youth, as a student at the University of St. Petersburg, Finkelstein had been an active socialist revolutionary and assimilationist, but when he returned to Kovno he changed greatly. Now he was a famous lawyer and owned a number of large houses. All the match factories belonged to him. He was transformed spiritually and had become a good Jew and was even close to Zionism.

Agriculture and the Jewish pioneer spirit were close to his heart. He devoted himself to this initiative and was at my disposal at all times. He was very wealthy and the vice-chairman of the national council.

All the vegetable growers and farmers gathered at the house of Sholem Khayat, and when I opened the meeting, a young girl, the daughter of one of the growers, started shouting at me. Her brother and a merchant, trading in flax and grain, had been murdered on the land of Pelednagiai. This was a period when there were many deserters from the Russian army; when they found that Jews had taken the lands of their parents, they ambushed them and slaughtered them at Pelednagiai.

The poor father and sister fled home, weeping and wailing. Those gathered for the meeting were distraught by the story, and rose to leave. I saw this as the beginning of the end. Tearfully, I begged them to stay, and explained what a disaster would befall us if the fear of death destroyed our will. "We are just beginning the war for our rights in Lithuania," I said, weeping bitterly. Finkelstein spoke after me. His words let me know what a great human being and valuable Jew stood before me.

The Pelednagiai training farm, known afterwards as *Kibush*, began to occupy a significant place in the life of the Jewish community. Keidan developed a respect for the youths involved. On Sabbaths and festivals, many young boys and girls visited the farm. They were invited at every opportunity and were pleased when they participated. The non-Jews called this place an agricultural school. Whole schools, with children and teachers, used to make pilgrimages from far and near, especially those of the Zionist organizations.

The police caused a great deal of grief and anxiety. This was a period of lawlessness, with violence coming from all quarters: Germans, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, deserters and simple bandits and robbers. Every young man was suspected of deserting from the army, prompting demands for bribes. At the Kibush farm there were sometimes 60 to 70 boys and girls, all young. There was constant fear of officials coming by day or night for inspections. I quickly learned the skill of paying them off. One of the members, Motel Talpiyot of blessed memory, got tired of living and threw himself down the well. The police were called, so I evacuated the farm members and many families until the fury abated.

There were many incidents, when the police met someone on the way from Pelednagiai and the members would say I was holding their identity papers. The police would come and tell me to get them released. Afterwards, in the evening, there would be a celebration at my place. There were times when I got Polish youths out of jail, and took on myself the responsibility to return them on the first request, while they actually were defectors from the Polish army. I had to do this to ensure they wouldn't tell the police about members of the Kibush. We became so smart that eventually we acquired forged identity documents, and thus we carried on for years.

There is a saying: The state is as are its people. The attitude of Count Zabiela to the renting of Vilain, the priest's effort to incite the tenant farmers, the behavior of the tenant farmers, the two martyrs at Pelednagiai, all showed clearly what sort of nationalists the Lithuanians were. Through the liquidation of the Kibush farm we learned the character of the people. In earlier times the Jews had occupied an important place in agriculture, and played an even more important role in the trade of agricultural products. Our political influence in the establishment of the Lithuanian Republic, and in its economic and international development, was not insignificant. Still, the Lithuanian government felt very uncomfortable. When they saw how Pelednagiai was growing and developing, they couldn't think of a more suitable place to house young Lithuanian criminals than the country's only Jewish training farm.

I once arranged for Dr. [Max] Soloveichik, a member of the Seimas and Minister of Jewish Affairs, along with the Minister of Agriculture to visit Pelednagiai. Dr. Soloveichik stopped at Pelednagiai and the Minister for Agriculture continued to Kovno. When we found out that they were going to close us down, the Jewish national council sent Dr. Ozer Finkelstein and me to negotiate with the director of the Ministry of Agriculture. We were not satisfied with what the director said, and Finkelstein told him that Lithuania had ministers, a government, the Seimas

and the law. The director replied: "You will work with the law, and we will work with the military." A few days later they closed us down, in the name of the Republic.

Kibush Peledagiai proved two points: First, it showed that we could, everywhere and under all circumstances, be creative, productive and able to indirectly help others. Second, it showed there is only one place in which our efforts and sacrifices will be rewarded: Eretz Israel, our own land and state.

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Keidan Between the Wars *Keidan Yizkor Book, p 141*

Ben-Alexander

From "Lita" [Lithuania], pp. 1587-9[87]*. Translated by Miriam Erez*

The town now consists of some 9,000 souls, a third of them Jews. The economic situation of the Jews has become very hard. Commerce has completely dried up. Many Jewish-owned shops have been taken over by Christians. The number of Jewish skilled artisans has also dropped drastically.

From time immemorial Keidan has had many gardeners, who sold the fruits of their labors not only in Shavl [Šiauliai] and Kovno [Kaunas], but as far away as Libau [Liepaja].

Even today, more than 50 Jewish families are engaged in growing vegetables. Yet the demand is very small, and only a few Jews who have their own land are able earn a livelihood from their produce. The Jewish *Folksbank* tries to help Jewish merchants, artisans, and farmers.

Regarding Jewish public life, there is little to boast about. Nevertheless, there is a school, called Tarbut, with 200 pupils and four teachers. The Yiddish *folkshul* has 35 pupils, and 40 to 50 children still attend *cheder*. There is even a Hebrew pro-gymnasium with three classes, but it is struggling to survive. The young people of Hashomer Hatzair keep an extensive library of good Yiddish and Hebrew volumes, which are well read.

Our civic and cultural institutions are currently in difficult condition. We are looking to our generous *landsleit* in America and Africa. From the large Keidan Society in New York we know of the energetic Dr. Chaim Yankel Epstein, Phillip Greenblatt and Bernard Richards. I'm also told of a well-liked Keidaner in the town of Waterbury, Connecticut, not far from New York, David Stein, who is said to be active in civic and cultural endeavors, as well as a talented painter.

Relations between the Jews and Lithuanians in Keidan up until the First World War were very good. It should be noted that in the early years of the 20th century, there was a small circle of educated Jews and Lithuanians who took an active part in Lithuania's liberation. In 1909, at the direction of the elderly Lithuanian patriot Dr. [Juozas] Jarašius, the Jewish apothecary Gurvich [*Yid*: Hurwitz, *Lith*: Gurvičius] printed medical prescriptions in Lithuanian. Despite the fact that Gurvich was condemned for doing so by the Russian medical authority, he continued to label his medications in Lithuanian only.

Thus the two peoples lived in peace and harmony, particularly during the years of the left-liberal political course. Recently, as evil winds began blowing our way from neighboring Germany, many Lithuanians have begun to fall under their influence. If this process does not cease, the ground may burn under the feet of Lithuania's Jews.

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[87] "Lita" [ליטע] published in Yiddish by the Jewish-Lithuanian Cultural Society, 1951, New York.

Stolypin and Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 142-3*

Berl Cohen, Durban

Translated by Miriam Erez

The name of Stolypin, once the second most powerful man in all Great Russia, was linked to Keidan, and also, it must be noted, to its Jewish community.

Piotr Arkadjevich Stolypin began as *"marshalik"* in Keidan. His exact title was *zemskij nachalnik*[88] , and his duties included contacts with the farmers and landowners. In addition, he headed the army recruitment committee. He also had an estate in Kalnaberzhe (Kalnaberžė), about 12 km north of Keidan.

He was later appointed commander of the Vilna police, and after that governor of Saratov. He reached the position of Minister of the Interior, and in 1906 was appointed prime minister, making him second only to Tsar Nikolai II. While in that position he was assassinated in a theater in Kiev in September 1911, with the Tsar's family in attendance. The gunman was a Jew by the name of Dmitri Bogrov who worked for the Russian *Okhrana* [secret police]. He had intended to also shoot the Tsar, but was arrested and executed within a month.

Until the day he died, Stolypin was a regular visitor to Keidan, spending a few months at a time at his estate with his family. Keidan and the surrounding area came to life then. More than a thousand gendarmes, policemen and secret police agents appeared weeks in advance, filling the road from the train station to [Stolypin's] estate and remaining until Stolypin himself left for St. Petersburg.

Stolypin often acted on Keidan's behalf. Although it had only the official status of a small town, he ordered that a government office be established there, along with a municipal school and other institutions generally found only in provincial capitals. He also had friendly relations with Keidan's head rabbi, Yonah Berger. On Sunday he would come from Kalnaberžė to church with his family. After the service Stolypin would stroll around to the officers' building, where he would receive many delegations from Keidan and its surrounding region. He would listen to their requests, and would fulfill them within a short time. The town rabbi was always the first to welcome him with bread and salt.

In 1909, one such delegation came from Kovno. It included the most important members of that Jewish community, among them Rabinovich, Volf and Soloveichik. They asked that an iron bridge be built across the Neman [Nemunas] river. A year later, construction began. As the Kovno delegation waited in front of the officers' building for Stolypin to arrive from church, they asked me, Yehuda Yoffe and Ora Michke (Bashe Shiyes) Vandrov to hold their coats and umbrellas. In return, each of us received half a ruble as a tip. We were also photographed with the delegation, but over the years I lost the photo.

After the shooting in Kiev, Stolypin fought for his life for about a week, during which his wife sent a telegram to town rabbi Yonah Berger asking the people to pray for his health. The Jews gathered in the synagogue, which was filled to capacity, and recited psalms. A few days later, a second telegram arrived from Stolypin's wife, announcing his death. While all across Russia he was considered an evil man, Keidan's Jews mourned him.

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[88] An official holding administrative and legal power over citizens of a Russian province.

Fire in the Town *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 144-8*

Yitzhak Wolpe, as told to David Wolpe

First published in the 1950 anniversary book, Keidan Sick Benefit & Benevolent Society of Johannesburg. Translated by Andrew Cassel.[89]

1.

It was 1914, late spring, just a week after the holiday of Shavuot. The air in our small town was light, sunny and fragrant. To us children the days were like giant, blue-speckled flowers with burning golden centers. And the nights, filled with sweet, intoxicating breezes, would rock us to sleep amid silver dreams.

It was on one such night—whether it was after Shabbat, or else just an ordinary Wednesday, I can't now recall—that the comfortable fabric of my dreams was ripped asunder by a familiar but frightened voice:

"Wake the children, quick! Yitzhak ... Itsikl, get up! My child, the house is on fire!"

Mother stood by my bed, looking pale, her blue eyes tearful.

I bolted up and sat, confused, on the edge of my bed, not knowing what was happening. Through the windowpane a dreadful light flapped crimson wings, clawing at our windows with a menacing blackness.

"What is it, Mama?" I stammered, barely able to cry out.

"Take the little children and run with them to Grandma's! Father and I may still be able to save something."

I was not yet twelve years old, but suddenly I found myself thrown into adulthood. There was danger. I had to help. I had responsibility ... a job to do ... duty! In that instant I became a grown-up. Fear left me. I quickly put on my short pants and jacket, and stood ready, no longer terrified by the flames climbing in at the windows. Now I know that on that night my fate was sealed, and the course of my later life set. From that night I became an independent person. And in our home, life was never the same again.

My smallest brother, Elimelekh, still an infant, was still lying in bed. The next oldest, Avraham, was also still a small, helpless child. Mother packed up both children and entrusted them to my care. I left the house with them. It was a mild summer midnight. As long as I live I won't forget that night.

The neighboring house was engulfed in flames and smoke; it crackled like a dry pile of kindling. Jews cursed and ran around like poisoned mice, back and forth; women moaned and writhed – it appeared the town had gone completely mad.

Through the tumult and confusion I strained with all my senses not to lose my little brothers. The horrible scene was reflected in their eyes, and in my childish heart there was only sadness. The house of our neighbor the tar dealer was burning like a torch, and the air turned sharp and biting from the tar smoke. I ran with the little ones to the middle of the market square, where we fell, exhausted, to the ground.

The fire had spread among the other houses. Women ran around holding small children in their arms, and men carried bundles of bedding. There was much wailing as everything was already enveloped in flame. My little heart grew heavier as I waited nervously for Father and Mother to arrive. The flickering light of the fire was reflected in my brothers' innocent faces, like the wings of a trapped bird...

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[89] This translation incorporates a second version of the story, which appears under the title "*di opgebrente heym*" (The Burned-up Home) in the book "*heymen, khaloymes, koshmarn*" (Homes, Dreams, Nightmares) by David Wolpe, Johannesburg, 1987. Where names and details differ between the two versions, we have used the later one.

I gathered up my courage and waited. Waited and watched over the little ones, like a faithful dog watches over his master's property. In my childish head was only one thought, repeated endlessly: Nothing must happen to the children!

So we stayed and waited for a long time in the middle of the market square, while the fire devoured one house after another. With me then was one more stunned and confused person, my older sister Esther. But mother had entrusted the children to me, and I felt it was I who carried the responsibility for them. And indeed, the children remained safe.

Only in the morning, when daylight flooded the smoking ruins of the town, was I able to read in Father's sad face and Mother's weeping eyes what an enormous tragedy had occurred. I ran out into the street, but was forced to come back immediately because the scene in the street oppressed me fearfully: Our house, the workshop, the store and warehouse had been wiped out, without a trace. But the fire had been put out here, right by our shop; everything beyond it remained intact. Father and Mother had saved only a little merchandise from the store before the fire reached it.

From then our troubles began, one after the other, linked in a chain, like a punishment from on high upon our family.

2.

Right after the fire we moved in with my grandma Leah, my mother's mother. Such a pious woman was hard to find even in those days. She was a saint who asked for nothing in this life, a woman whose heart held nothing but goodwill and mercy for all, strangers as well as her own kin. She gave charity anonymously, and devoted herself to raising her children, instilling in them a spirit of goodness and honesty. I still recall how proud it made me, even as a little boy, to hear people speak of my grandma's virtues. More than once I heard it said that such a fine woman, a woman without a mean bone in her body, came along once in ten generations, and I was fortunate to be in her presence daily.

But then Father became terribly sick. Our misfortune had dealt him too hard a blow; the colossal exertion and stress during the fire had ruined his health, and in a short time left him wrecked in body and spirit. He needed to be taken to a major specialist in a large city, or so decreed the doctors of our little town. There he had to remain several weeks in a clinic, under the constant care of the medical professionals there. And quite miraculously, Father returned to health and became himself again.

But a new affliction already awaited our family. On the very day that father left the hospital, as we awaited him with happy hearts, war was declared, the Great War of 1914. And right away, before he even had a chance to get home, he was obliged to report to the military. That was the order: to immediately report for duty in whatever district one happened to be at the time.

We had hopes at first that Father, following such a serious illness, would not be taken from us. But we all were bitterly disappointed, as Father was quickly drafted and mobilized. He had been born in St. Petersburg and spoke a fine, polished Russian, and that proved his undoing. The army needed educated men like him immediately, the military commission declared, and they dispatched him straightaway to Grodno.

On Mother's shoulders descended the burden of making a living and at the same time caring for five small children. We children felt as though we had been robbed of the precious and beloved thing we called Daddy. Our longing for him doubled and multiplied with each passing day. We didn't exactly know what it was that had torn our father from us, but we heard the grown-ups talking of something called a war, and we came to understand that this thing, war, was to blame.

Consumed with the daily chores and troubles, Mother no longer had time to care for us, and we were left suddenly without the warmth and tenderness that other children enjoyed. As the oldest, I, a twelve-year-old, was suddenly launched into a new life, the tough life of a grown-up. I was appointed head of the household.

Like an apple grows ripe in the sun, so did I, in a short time, grow ripe from troubles. Childish games and pastimes ceased to interest me. Our life turned joyless as I earnestly took up the functions of household head, who had to worry about his little brothers. Carrying responsibilities that were greater than my years strengthened my spirit and energy, and in some ways tamed and replaced my childhood yearnings.

Mother had it very hard. But the stress and loneliness never made her bitter, and she never was heard complaining about her fate. No task was too difficult if it was for us, and she never appeared jealous or held a grudge against the neighbors whose lot was far better than ours.

With the little bit of merchandise that had been rescued and a little saved-up cash, Mother restarted the business. She would stand in the store until late in the evening, while I stayed in the workshop, keeping an eye on the children. In the quiet hours when they played or slept, I would help with the sewing. Our workshop and our living quarters were together. We had a cap factory, where we sewed hats and other fur goods. Learning that trade well as a young boy gave me a certain self-confidence in later life.

By then I understood what a war was, and that Father probably would not be coming home soon, and I accustomed myself to a stone-hard life, devoid of ordinary childish joys and hopes. Late at night, tired, I would fall asleep with sorrow gnawing at my heart; I knew that we lacked the love that other children had, but Mother's pale blue eyes, moist with gratitude, gave me quiet comfort.

"My child, my Itsikl," she would say, "you're my only support now. My beloved child, may the Lord reward you with happiness and success in your life."

That small bit of mother-love sustained me in those days.

3.

That life made me an old child, with a sense of judgement and responsibility. I came to understand that working more meant earning more, and earning more meant living better. One had to exert oneself, so we contracted to sew for the military, and I became a little entrepreneur. This didn't come easily to me, because all the businesslike calculations required years of experience. And very often I would find myself feeling helpless and inferior, not knowing how to handle our problems. That deeply affected my mood and spirit.
I also had to do the hard housework – carrying water from the nearby river, cutting wood and lighting the oven, putting the children to bed and rocking them to sleep at night. We more than filled up the little house, so I had to sleep with my brother Avraham above the stove ...

Nearly a year went by. The river behind our home dried up. Outside it turned warm, and mild breezes blew. With the coming of spring our souls grew lighter, and it seemed to me that new hope would sprout for our family.

Around Passover our family was destined to grow larger: We were getting a new little brother, and we children took the news with great rejoicing. This brought a new division of labor among us; my sister, still then a little girl, had to take over Mother's duties in the shop. It was pitiful to observe such a dainty creature dealing all day with the village peasants, who were typically drunk and coarse. My authority as head of the house broadened, with vastly increased responsibiilties: Watching over the children and acting as both nanny and tutor, besides helping with the sewing; carrying water and tending the fire, all as before. Still, that year, I would sometimes steal a few minutes late in the evening to read a storybook. I had had to give up my schooling early – there was no time or opportunity for it – but reading was for me like a glimpse into a beautiful, carefree world, each book a magic land to be discovered. Dead tired, I would fall asleep late by the weak night-lamp and creep above the oven to my "bed." Awakening in the morning, I would try to recall the stories and in my childish way, fantasize about their further course ...

Passover came and went. And again the blooming blue days and nights of silver graced our poor little town, like a magic charm hanging overhead. For reasons I couldn't then comprehend, our baby brother didn't have his circumcision on time, and it was already getting toward Shavuot again. Mother said: "Already a year since our great misfortune! Perhaps, my

little joy, you will bring luck to our home?" And her tear-streaming eyes beamed at the baby's face, which was already red from crying.

The days were restless. Jews bustled about, whispering assorted rumors of pogroms and harsh government decrees that were occurring in other towns and villages, and were likely to make their way here as well soon.

The air became dense and black, laden with heavy clouds. Our little town filled up with soldiers, who took over market and the surrounding streets when the military barracks ran out of room. The Jewish houses became sad and cheerless as hordes of booted, bearded, cursing Russians spread fear among the people. Here and there the Cossacks assaulted Jews, taking their money and merchandise, and issuing "assurances" that the time was soon coming when they would make an end of the "*zhids*" ... Jews sat in their houses as if on hot coals, and waited for salvation.

No salvation came. Instead, there came an order from the military high command, that within three days, all Jews had to leave Kovno province.

"What are we to do now? How can we travel, for who knows how long, with a baby not yet circumcised?" Mother's grief burst out, and she ran around madly seeking advice from rabbis and others.

Despite all the confusion, when word got out that the circumcision was still to be performed, all the women of the town gathered at our house. As I recall it, each one asked that the baby be named for a near relative or friend, suggesting that the namesake had been of such merit that his heavenly worth would help us survive our ordeal.

"Such righteousness will help us all, Chaye-Libe my dearest! ... Name him after my grandpa, do you hear? He was a holy man, a saint!" Thus did the women argue their cases, each trying to convince my mother of the great merit of their sanctified uncles or aunts. But Mother was not impressed.

The honor was finally given to Sara-Leah, a cousin of granny Badanes (father's mother), who named the baby after her husband. The circumcision was performed two days before we left, in haste and fear amid the boxes and bedding. Our things were already packed for the journey, and there we were, having a celebration – but quietly, secretly, lest we arouse the curiosity of the gentiles and the thieving Cossacks. And so we quit our little town carrying a new little brother who had a new name – Yisrael.

We traveled different paths, however. Because of the baby's recent circumcision, Mother had to travel with all her children on the train that the government had prepared to evacuate the Jews. It was a terrible hardship, traveling right after a circumcision in a crowded rail carriage, with no water or medications to be found. Upon my back fell the responsibility for the few poor possessions we had left. There was no one else to rely on but me, the oldest in the family, so we hired a cart, on which we packed up all the household items and the merchandise. And down the highway, through towns already half-abandoned by Jews, I and the wagon driver ventured off, exiles in the world. We dragged ourselves through the heat and dust to Vilna.

I had just turned twelve years old, but I was already the family guardian.

It was three days before Shavuot. The fields made me drunk with their sweet spring smells. I lay half-slumbering, my insides rocking back and forth with the goods and my heart repressing tears. I felt lonely and lost, but I knew that I had to watch over the property that had been entrusted to me. I understood that this was all we had, and from this we had to earn our living until Father returned from the war.

On the road we had to stop, hide in the woods or drive out of our way in order to avoid the villages, where gentiles were known to have robbed Jews. Because of the fear of thieves our short trip took much longer, and Mother was beside herself with worry. Eventually, however, our long wanderings ended and we came safely to Vilna, and Mother greeted us with tears of joy.

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The Doctor and the Police Chief *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 149-153*

Pesach Weitzer-Chittin, Kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Chaim Charutz

This event in the life of Keidan, about which I wish to write, I heard of from my father, of blessed memory, when I was a child. Later, in about 1923, I heard the story not only from an eyewitness, but from someone who took an active part in it. He was Moshe Milner, the Jewish owner of a soft-drink bottling plant, a learned and educated man, and most importantly a big prankster.

Here is a short preface: In 1923, when Lithuania was already an independent country, a new provincial minister called Januškevičius arrived in Keidan. He was a young Lithuanian nationalist, a clear and open antisemite. In his desire to improve and beautify the city, he took drastic measures, which caused problems mainly for the Jewish population. He ordered the very rapid construction of wooden sidewalks along all the streets; the installation of gates between all houses; the whitewashing and painting of all houses fronting on the street; and most importantly, that the streets be kept so clean that house owners would need to spend the entire day sweeping. The provincial minister gave police a free hand to implement this order strictly, and to report any violations. The fines to be collected from these reports reached fairly high sums. There were days when dozens of reports were written. In short, the Jews suffered seriously from the arbitrariness of both the police and the minister.

It should be obvious that a situation like this would further unite the Jews, especially since earning a living was not easy for them. This was because it was spring, and most of the Jewish inhabitants of the city were involved in growing cucumbers. Whenever a few Jews gathered to discuss things, conversation quickly centered on the reports. One summer evening, a few of us young people were hanging around in the street, talking, obviously, about this painful issue. Suddenly Moshe Milner approached us and joined our conversation.

After a few minutes he addressed us directly: "What are you guys worth that you allow things to be conducted like this? You're sitting around with crossed arms while the provincial minister is impoverishing the town's Jews? Why don't you behave the way we behaved more than thirty years ago, when we had a similar issue?"

"And what should we do, Reb Moshe?" we asked.

"What should you do?" he replied, "A few guys should sit down and write a complaint to the minister of the interior, or even to the state president, saying in simple and clear language that the Keidan provincial minister is taking revenge on the Jewish inhabitants of the town for personal reasons. He's abusing them, issuing illegal fines for bad hygiene despite the fact that our cleanliness here is exemplary. You can add that the minister is always drunk, plays cards day and night, and is absolutely not fulfilling his function as the representative of a democratic government (the phrase "democratic government" was very common then). Sign a fictitious name to the letter – and that's that!"

Of course we did not act on Moshe Milner's suggestion. However, his mention of the similar situation more than thirty years earlier gave me a chance to ask him for the details of that incident, which I wish to relate. Naturally Milner agreed to tell the story.

In 1890, he began, when Lithuania was still known as Kovno *guberniya* [province] under Russia's rule, a new doctor by the name of Yevtekhovsky arrived at the Keidan regional hospital. He was Russian by birth. As was happening again, he and the local *pristav*[90] became overly attentive to the town's cleanliness, and to harass the Jews. They started handing out violation reports – called "protocols" – left and right. I suffered especially

[90] A regional police chief, considered an absolute ruler in small towns of the Russian empire.

because of my soft-drink plant. A week did not pass when they didn't "credit" me with two protocols. You can imagine the level of cleanliness in small towns like Keidan in the 1890s!

Now the Jewish inhabitants of Keidan learned that, instead of transmitting the fines for these violations to the state treasury, the *pristav* would cancel the protocols for a bribe, which he took for himself. There were those who said that he shared this money with Dr. Yevtekhovsky. It also became known that the cancelled protocols were thrown on the stove in the *pristav's* office.

Well, a few of us got together for discussion, and we decided to send a complaint about both the *pristav* and the doctor to the governor in Kovno. But how could we get the evidence; i.e., the cancelled protocols? Eventually we found a solution to this as well.

In Keidan, there lived a Jew by the name of Mendel Epstein. He owned a butcher shop, and was a supplier of meat to the army. He used to come and go among the local authorities, and was on good terms with the *pristav* and his secretary. Another Keidan Jew, Neta Wolpert (who was also among those helping draft the complaint to the governor) and I consulted with Epstein.

He advised that the three of us should stage an event, as follows: The next morning at a certain time, Wolpert and I would go to the *pristav's* office to ask how to get a license to build a storehouse for firewood. Epstein would already be waiting for us in the office. We would not remove our hats on entering the office, although we knew that we should remove our hats in a government office. It was winter then, and we both wore big fur hats. The *pristav's* secretary would probably shout at us to remove our hats. And if he did not, Epstein himself would rebuke us, and would approach us, grab the hats and throw them onto the stove (where, as we know, the cancelled reports were).

At the same time, both Wolpert and I would start apologizing to the secretary, explaining that we were religious Jews and that we didn't know we should remove our hats. We would beg forgiveness, and ask about the license for the firewood storehouse. Later, we would ask for our hats. Epstein would then intervene, and tell us angrily that we should get our own hats from the stove. While at the oven, we would put as many cancelled protocols as possible into our hats.

And so it happened: The entire drama worked perfectly. During our performance, Epstein chastised us, "Aren't you ashamed not to remove your hats in the office of his honor, the *pristav*, when on the wall hangs the picture of his supreme majesty the Tsar!?" And so on."

When we went to the stove to retrieve our hats, Epstein distracted the secretary while we filled the hats with protocols. We left the stove with a veritable treasure of cancelled protocols – the decisive evidence. We said goodbye and left.

We arranged the protocols at home. There were about thirty crumpled reports. We went to a writer of applications, big Abramovitch, to compose the complaint. He wrote it in a nicely poetic style, like this:

"Two years ago, a terrible drought hit southeast Russia, causing tens of thousands of deaths. Last year a cholera plague broke out in Siberia, causing terrible loss of life. This year, there were floods which caused heavy casualties and damage. There were fires throughout Russia, plague in the Far East, an earthquake in the city of Varna, with hundreds of casualties – in short, disasters and calamities that should not happen again. However, in our town, Keidan, thank God, nothing happened; no plague, no fires, no floods and no earthquakes. We simply lived a quiet and tranquil life, and we were even able to assist the victims of some of these other tragedies. Suddenly, however, a new government doctor, Yevtekhovsky, arrived in our town and, together with the local *pristav*, conspired to write up violation reports daily for lack of cleanliness without due reason, since we try to maintain hygiene, which is the basis of our health. It seems as if the main job of the doctor and the *pristav* is to write up reports. It might be all right if at least the state treasury had benefited

from these fines, but, in the words of the Talmud, not a bit of it![91] They cancel nearly all the fines in exchange for bribes, which they put into their own pockets to live lives of profligacy and drunkenness. They play cards night after night. As proof of this, we attach scores of cancelled protocols, which we managed to obtain. How is it possible for such injustice and crime to occur in our dear homeland? We request that your highness set up a comprehensive inquiry and punish the guilty ones."

The complaint was signed by me, Moshe Milner, and by Neta Wolpert.

We sent the complaint together with the canceled protocols to the governor in Kovno. This is when our troubles started.

It appeared that one of the clerks working in the governor's office was a relative of Dr. Yevtekhovsky. When the complaint with the protocols arrived, this clerk extracted all the protocols, destroyed them, and left the complaint without any evidence. The complaint was then presented to the governor, who ordered an investigation and had Wolpert and me charged with libeling government officials. From accusers, we suddenly became the accused.

After a while, Wolpert and I were summoned by an investigator in Keidan. I pretended to be a madman. My replies were completely irrelevant to the point. The policeman who accompanied me, (he received a small "something"), told the investigator that, as far as he knew, I was a normal person but that I had recently become mentally ill. When the investigator asked who wrote the complaint, both Wolpert and I said it was a man who had left Keidan a few months before for America. Thus there was no fear that others would be accused. After the investigation they wanted to arrest us, but they let us off on bail.

We waited for the trial, which was supposed to take place in the regional court in Kovno.

We consulted with a lawyer before the trial. He told us there was no chance we would be acquitted. The charge was quite serious, and the sentence could be a year or more in prison. The only way out, he advised us, was to continue pretending to be insane. As you guys know me – Moshe Milner said, smiling – I'm quite an expert at this.

We studied and memorized his arguments before the day of judgement.

At the trial in Kovno – Moshe Milner continued – Wolpert and I appeared dressed as pitiful beggars. We didn't want an attorney using our case to learn the art of defense at our expense, for one simple reason: An attorney by nature would attempt to show us as innocent. A prosecutor by nature would try to prove the opposite. Thus the advocate's appearance would only demonstrate our guilt, giving the prosecutor the advantage. By simple logic we concluded that our insane behavior would be more likely to succeed.

And so it happened. In truth, we were very scared when we entered the courtroom. The judges entered and the public stood up. "The trial will begin!" the herald loudly proclaimed – "of Neta Wolpert and Moshe Milner, accused, according to criminal law, of serious libel against government officials."

The charge was read out. The first accused was Neta Wolpert, who answered in broken Russian, with a mixture of Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish.

Here is the conversation between the judge and Neta Wolpert:

Judge: Did you sign the complaint to the governor?

Wolpert: Yes, but it was a request, not a complaint.

Judge: Do you consider yourself guilty?

Wolpert: No.

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[91] "מיקצתיה ולא מיניה לא" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Suta 5,1)

Judge: Do you know the contents of the complaint?

Wolpert: When they got me to sign the request, they told me that, since winter was approaching, and scores of Keidan families weren't able to buy firewood, we should ask the government to let us have free wood for these families. By the way, didn't I go to ask the *pristav* for permission to build a storehouse for wood? I later discovered that this was something else completely, about which I understood nothing. God only knows that I am innocent. I hereby beg for mercy, and that you should acquit me, (here, he spoke a sentence from the Rosh Hashana prayers while putting his hand on his head; none of the judges understood him).

His words aroused both laughter and pity among the public as well as from the judges and prosecutor.

Finally, my turn came – said Moshe Milner, seriously.

The same standard questions, and the same answers, with the small difference that I also used a few Lithuanian words that I knew. To the main question, whether I knew the contents of the complaint, I replied:

"I didn't know that this was a complaint, and I'm not the sort of person who would file a complaint because, according to our Torah, an informer is an evil man and his end is in hell. Things were like this: They told me there are Jewish soldiers of our esteemed tsar's army in Keidan. These soldiers are religious and want to keep the Laws of Moses. They don't eat non-kosher meat (I said this phrase in Hebrew). They therefore wanted to ask his excellency the governor if he would allow them to have kosher food. Because I am religious, (here I held my fringes), I signed the plea wholeheartedly. Moreover I saw Neta Wolpert's signature on the plea. I know that he is a very devout man, and I also wanted to do a *mitzvah*. It would be unthinkable for me to complain about officials, because, as it says in the Talmud, 'the king's law is the law!'." I added a few more sentences from the *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), and I translated them with some difficulty by myself. Finally I hit myself over my heart, as one does on Yom Kippur, and I ended, my voice choked by total remorse, with a plea for mercy for myself and my family, and with a comment that I was leaving my fate in the hands of the court of justice.

Both the judges and the prosecutor were a bit stunned by our words. Our style of talking gave them reason to believe that there was perhaps some truth in our claims. Finally, the presiding judge turned to the prosecutor and asked his opinion.

The prosecutor looked at us for a moment. Apparently, our appearance and dress took away his desire to argue with us. Maybe his pity was finally aroused. In short, he contented himself with the following words only: "I support the charge." Even this was said in a weak voice.

The judges went out for consultation, and we waited for the verdict. After a while, the judges returned. The public rose once more. The entire charge was read out again in detail: that Moshe Milner and Neta Wolpert had signed a complaint libeling government officials. The court found them guilty; but, considering the extenuating circumstances that neither of them knew what they were signing, and that both of them sincerely regretted their actions, the court was imposing a fine of one ruble on each of them.

We sighed with relief, and paid the fines immediately without excess emotion, so as not to arouse suspicion.

We left the courthouse and went to the Keidaner hostel in the old city in Kovno. We ate lunch (having fasted until noon), changed our clothes, and returned home.

You should know – ended Moshe Milner – that from that time onwards, the arbitrary reports stopped being issued in Keidan, while our relationships with Dr. Yevtekhovsky became most friendly.

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Vanished Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 154-160*

Pesach Weitzer-Chittin, Kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Writing down memories of the town where you were born and spent close to 40 years evokes strong longings and yearnings. It is many times more difficult to write about the town whose Jews, young and old, were all annihilated, with incomparable cruelty, by bestial creatures on one day – the bitter, heart rending 5 Elul 5701 (Aug. 28, 1941).

Reviving such memories is both nerve-wracking and heartbreaking. Thirty years have passed since that day, but it is still hard to accept what happened there. It is hard to imagine an entire community, 3,700 people, marching to their deaths on a sun-drenched summer morning, surrounded by their murderers – their Christian neighbors – who will annihilate them in only a few hours. Yet this nightmare became reality.

My tongue is impoverished and my imagination is weak when I try to describe this cruel slaughter. My cry is smothered. My broken heart is unable to mourn, eulogize and cry for the people I knew for so many years: the innocent children and babies, pure as angels, who hadn't even begun to taste life. Such mourning and lamentation is beyond human endurance.

This book represents a memorial to our Keidan, which was and is no more. Black night has descended on Jewish Keidan, replacing the daylight that shone for our loved ones.

Ancient Keidan, which existed for more than five hundred years has been wiped out. The lives of many generations were cut off and exterminated within a few hours.

With great difficulty I choke back my tears. When I think on the horrible Holocaust, I cannot understand logically how it happened. Yet reality invades my thoughts and cries bitterly: Keidan has vanished!

A rich human landscape

My beloved Keidan, you rise up in my memory out of the long distant past. Sometimes clearly, and sometimes blurred, but always with pleasant feelings, touched with grace and longing. I remember you from the dawn of my childhood.

I still recognize your roads and lanes, bustling with Jews, among them workers and craftsmen, shopkeepers worrying about their livelihood; children carrying their books, hurrying to *cheder* and school on weekdays; and dressed for Shabbat, filled with spirituality, rushing to synagogue on holy and festive days.

I remember your youth before and after the First World War. Awake, thirsting for knowledge, imbued with national but also religious consciousness, holding to tradition but also loving sports.

When I immerse myself in the past and remember its bustling life, young people striving after ideals, all now lost, my heart is in pain. As the Talmud says, "They are a great loss, and no others can be found like them." An entire human landscape passes before my eyes, familiar and beloved faces, evoking longing.

My teachers and tutors

I would first like to remember my tutors and teachers, those who educated and moulded the spiritual character of Jewish children.

My first rabbi was Reb Simcha Vilenchik, of blessed memory. A tall Jew, slim, with a long beard. I think he was more than 60 years old, but he understood well the nature of tender children by the standards of those times, 70 years ago. He was naturally kind-hearted and almost never hit us. We attended class even after the end of Shabbat, when he would treat

us to honey cake. He used to tell us stories, thereby winning our affection. His house was small and dilapidated. I studied with him for three seasons.

I was then promoted to the class of the teacher Shmuel Yehuda Eides, of blessed memory. He was a learned person who knew Hebrew, Russian and arithmetic well. His *cheder* was spacious and tidy. He taught us Hebrew, grammar and Bible. I began then to speak Hebrew. I recall that when I was about ten years old he taught us the Prophet Isaiah in Hebrew, with Hebrew explanations. It can definitely be said that in this *cheder* we learned the foundation of the Hebrew language; our Jewish consciousness expanded substantially there.

The third rabbi was Reb Moshe Burshtein, of blessed memory, nicknamed "the Telzer" because he was a graduate of the Telz (Telšiai) yeshiva. We learned Gemara, Bible and Hebrew vocabulary and grammar from him. The teaching system was fairly modern for those times (1907–1910). This rabbi trained us in Torah and proper behaviour during the three or four years we studied with him. He was a Zionist and encouraged our use of Hebrew. All his children were members of Hashomer Hatzair in Keidan. His entire family perished in the Holocaust.

Among the *melameds* in Keidan, Israel Nachman Shamesh, of blessed memory, was noteworthy. He was a god-fearing man, pure and honest. By chance I happened to read a copy of his handwritten will, a portion of which is engraved on my memory. It went approximately like this:

"I am old and soon will go the way of all flesh. Master of the Universe, I am prepared to stand before you with a still heart and a clean conscience. I tried to tread a straight path, never insulted anyone, did not gossip, and so forth. I taught little children, and in this I saw my life's goal."

In him I saw a Jew totally at peace with his creator. His son, who was educated, quiet and introverted, was a teacher as well.

Others in Keidan included my Gemara teacher, Yitzhak (called Itzik Yechiels, I don't recall his surname); Avraham Sochen, who taught me Talmud, Bible and Hebrew; David Yitzhak Bloshtein, an excellent teacher of Bible and Hebrew; the *melamed* Koplansky. They all taught Torah to small children and adolescents.

One should mention Reb Israel Akiva Prusak, who taught girls Yiddish and arithmetic.

May their memories be blessed.

The 22nd of Kislev

The custom of "*ba'ch*[92] *Kislev*" was observed by the Keidan Burial Society in this manner:

On the eve of 22 Kislev, all the Burial Society members would go to the public bath house. Under his contract with the community, the bath house lessee was obliged to heat it for the Burial Society twice a year at no charge: Once on the eve of Hoshana Raba (the last night of Sukkot), and again on the eve of 22 Kislev. After bathing, the members would put on their holiday clothes and assemble in the gravediggers' synagogue, where they would read psalms all night.

Early the next morning they chanted morning prayers, using a high-holidays tune. Of course all the Burial Society members fasted that day. The town cantor led the service, standing by the holy ark. (David Feinzinger served as cantor in Keidan more than 80 years ago. He had a very pleasant voice and was also a composer. Among his many melodies was one for the prayer "O God, the soul you have given me is pure," which the Burial Society chanted on 22 Kislev.)

[92] From ב׳ך, the Hebrew number for 22

After the prayers, the *gabbai* of the society led the members up to the cemetery, where they walked past the graves of all those deceased in the previous year, asking forgiveness if they had offended them during their ritual purification or interment. Returning to town they said the afternoon prayers, and afterwards ... there was a banquet, the Burial Society's main event. On that occasion the society also elected new members, choosing them carefully based on morals and behaviour.

The burial of sacred texts

In the anteroom of every synagogue stood a number of wooden boxes, into which the congregation placed torn or damaged prayer books, other religious texts or worn-out pages. These worn or damaged articles, which couldn't be used, were called "s*heimes."*

In the summer of 1910, a group of us boys, aged 13 and 14, were bathing in the Smilga creek opposite the cemetery. Suddenly, we heard the sound of music coming from the graveyard. At first, we were frightened – music from a cemetery! After we calmed down a bit, we ascended to the cemetery, where a rare sight met our eyes. They were burying the boxes of *sheimes*, accompanied by an orchestra.

When we asked about this back in town, we were told that these burials took place about once every ten years. Wagon drivers would volunteer to transport the *sheimes.* They would clean the carts and the horses, put on their holiday clothes and carry the *sheimes* (at no charge, of course) to their burial place in the cemetery, accompanied by musicians.

The story is told that once, while the wagons with the *sheimes* were passing through town, one of them stopped suddenly. Those escorting it were a bit shocked until a certain clever Jew piped up, saying "Don't worry; the horse just paused at a passage, since he's carrying so many of them."

Baking matzo

A certain Jew who had a baking oven, used to make it kosher each Passover in order to bake matzos. The baking started a few days after Purim. The work was quite hard, since it was all done manually. Shifts lasted at least 12 hours, if not more. They had to hurry, otherwise the dough would rise. Workers were paid little, but what was the alternative? Those with little means worked hard at this in order to earn something before Pesach. Young people also worked there, bringing a lot of joy to this exhausting labor with their merry songs.

On the last night before the holiday, after the last batch of matzo was finished two or three hours after midnight, it was customary to have a performance, most often the "Binding of Isaac" or the "Selling of Joseph." The sound could be heard throughout the neighborhood for a few hours before daybreak. The bleary-eyed singers and actors struggled to stay awake after so many weeks of insufficient sleep, but made the effort to perform and sing, knowing their work was done and they had earned something for the holiday. Many of the neighbors rushed to attend these presentations.

By the way, many shining new talents were discovered at these performances. Given better economic circumstances, and with suitable training, they would most likely have achieved fame in the wider world.

When matzo baking became mechanized before the First World War, the old contract system – called "podryad" – became obsolete.

The hero Tzadok Shlapobersky, hy'd[93]

(From a letter by Chaim Ronder, of blessed memory)

"I need to dedicate a few words to our dear Tzadok Shlapobersky, a ray of light in those dark days. His name serves as a symbol of the highest valor to me and all of us. He wrote a glorious and shining page in the history of Keidan Jews.

"It was Tzadok alone who, in the last few moments before his own death, dragged a German commander into the pit and wounded him. The shooting stopped at that moment and the policemen jumped into the pit with unsheathed bayonets to try and save the officer. A life-and-death struggle ensued between Tzadok and the policemen. He bit one of them in the throat and ripped it open, upon which the policeman fell dead on the spot. He also injured a second policeman, who died two days later.

"The policemen stabbed him with bayonets. He was the only one who died heroically, but in doing so avenged the Nazi dogs in the name of all of us.

"His memory is forever engraved on our hearts!"

Chana Landsberg

She was an outstanding elementary school teacher for decades, although with her knowledge and abilities she could easily have been a high-school teacher. However, she saw educating and nurturing children from the start of their development after kindergarten as her main task in life.

She was a quintessential primary school teacher in the fullest meaning of the word, and had all the necessary qualities for this task. I knew her when she was still a gymnasium pupil; I used to visit her brother Yakov of blessed memory, my good friend, at their house 65 years ago. After the First World War, we used to meet often at all types of Zionist activities. She devoted all her free time to Eretz Israel, with the Jewish National Fund, United Israel Appeal and *Hechalutz* (Pioneers), fundraising for the Eretz-Israel Workers' Fund, *Hapoel*, the distribution of the Zionist shekel, and so on.

One could always see her rushing about among Keidan Jews collecting for various funds, donating and encouraging others to donate. She herself was always first to give, with a generous hand. For many years she chaired the committee of the Keidan orphanage. Her love and concern for the orphans was boundless. She did everything quietly, with loyalty, devotion, and modesty.

She was loved and respected by all sectors of the community. I see her before my eyes, a symbol of the totally committed communal worker until the last bitter and violent day.

Reb Meir-Dovid Fein, of blessed memory, husband of Etel the Bagel Baker

I often see him, in my mind's eye, robed in white with a prayer shawl covering his head, in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, particularly during the shmone-esre prayer, and when he reached the confession of sins he would burst into bitter, heartrending sobs.

He was a quiet, cordial Jew, laboring all week from dawn to night baking bagels. He was as distanced from sin as east is from west. He devoted each free minute to reciting psalms that he knew by heart. He was indeed a pure and honest Jewish soul.

[93] Abbreviation for "may god avenge his blood" – i.e., he was murdered.

Schwartz the tailor, of blessed memory. (I don't remember his first name.)

A simple tailor, pleasant and friendly, he labored quietly at home on a second floor, near the bridge. I attended *cheder* with his son, which is why I visited his home often. He was exceptionally honest. He never took even the tiniest sliver of fabric from a customer who came to order clothes.

Before he died, he asked that the wood from his workbench be used to make his coffin.

The locksmith Yaakov Wolpert, of blessed memory

He was a simple man of the people. Although weighed down with work, he always found time to devote to communal needs, in a practical way. Whenever he heard that someone was in trouble and needed help, he would immediately put his hammer down, go into the street and rouse people to give help. He was a member of the fire brigade for many years. This was not just to show off, but to actually participate in that difficult, dirty work.

The poet Zvi (Hirsh) Bloshtein

Translated by Monty Starr, Birmingham, UK

"D*o not disregard the poor, as the Torah will come from them"*

This saying comes to mind when I recall my Keidan friend Zvi (Hirsh) Bloshtein. I first met him when I was 15. He was older than me by about two years. From bits of information that I have come across I know that his father died when he was a young boy. His mother was a baker of bread and they lived under stressful conditions. I think he only took primary religion classes, and never attended any other school. I do know that the son of the Keidan rabbi taught him Talmud, and his relative David Yitzhak Bloshtein taught him Hebrew and Bible. My cousin, who was the same age, instructed him in arithmetic, and someone else taught him the basics of the Russian language.

He was a talented boy and he applied himself to reading, learning and development, and by the age of 18 had mastered the Russian language. In mathematics he attained quite a high level in algebra.

I recall that at the age of 17 he first translated a poem from Yiddish to Russian, which was passed from hand to hand in the town, and everyone marveled at the meter and beauty of the translation. From then he started to write poetry and stories in Yiddish that were published in newspapers before the First World War.

We met and took walking trips together many times. In 1914 he went to live in the nearby town of Yanova (Jonava), and worked as a private teacher there.

During the First World War he moved to Russia and continued writing there. In 1919 he returned to Lithuania and was one of the editors of a Jewish weekly (I forget its name). He published several books, among them a novel. He eventually emigrated to South America, and finally settled back in the Soviet Union, in Tshernovitz (Chernovtsy). In later years I read some of his stories in *"Sovietish Heimland."* His theme was the lives of laborers before the First World War, and a depiction of the revolutionary idealists emerging from society's lower classes.

Although now he is to be found on the other side of the revival and historic reconstruction of his people's homeland, I believe he still deserves mention as a prolific poet and author, a son of Keidan.

Reb Abba-Yehuda Friedland, of blessed memory

I knew Reb Abba-Yehuda Friedland, of blessed memory, when I was still a little boy. He used to visit us often. He was a very likeable person. He was very popular despite the fact that he was wealthy. He was good-looking, mingled with people and especially loved a folksy joke. He had a sweet voice and sometimes led prayers from the pulpit.

If one hadn't seen Abba-Yehuda on Simchat Torah together with Reb Leizer Finkelstein, the rabbi from the Talmud Torah, wearing towels as cummerbunds, singing cantorial melodies and then chanting, as if reading the *haftorah,* a story in Lithuanian about a farmer who brought a cartload of wood and a goose to market – if one hadn't witnessed this scene, he would never know true hilarity.

He once told me that he had travelled to Vilna especially to see and hear Eliakum Zunser, who composed, among others, the song "With my plough."

He had an ironmonger shop and a license to sell weapons to those eligible to carry them. I remember that in 1906, when the town was in grave danger of pogroms after a Russian soldier had been killed, Abba-Yehuda made a public announcement: "Come, take weapons, no license and no charge. I will be responsible for the license."

Ze'ev (Velve) Tober, of blessed memory

When we were young we called him "grandfather of the Russian revolution." He had already participated actively in the 1905 revolt. He studied in a yeshiva and was familiar with Yiddish and Russian literature. He was an orator and a debater. He could always be seen standing at the door of his house next to the bridge, his head slightly tilted to the side, his hair long, wearing spectacles and hotly debating social improvement and social justice, while softly humming a folk song. He was a member of *Poalei Zion* and took an active part in self-defense.

He visited Eretz-Israel in 1925.

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I have recorded a very small portion of my memory bundle. A few scenes and sketches of personalities. There are still many untold tales raging in my heart. My eyes still scan Keidan and I conduct discourses with many of the characters I met along the way. I see as if through the haze (or perhaps the tears), all the dearly loved ones whose threads of life were cut by the foul hand of our generation's Satan.

We commemorate the souls of our loved ones on the day that this book enters our homes. Their images float in front of our eyes, and their speechless lips murmur "revenge!" The lugubrious chant that arises from these pages and its dreary echo fill the space in each house.

The heart mourns the tender, pure souls who crowd each page of this book, those who did not survive and live with us. Our eyes flood with bitter tears for the demonic, brutal loss of life, of our loved ones who were completely innocent of any wrong.

Let these meagre pages be our memorial candles for the martyrs of Keidan!

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Memorial at the mass grave at Babyan (Borer woods.)



Keidaners in Israel on Commemoration Day, at the Chamber of the Holocaust on Mt. Zion

Of Wood and Medicine *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 161-163*

Mordechai Muller, Moscow

Translated by Chaim Charutz

This is an excerpt from a letter written on November 28, 1965 to Yehuda Ronder, Kovno, by Mordechai Muller, a Moscow resident. The writer (the son of Alter the jester) ended up in Moscow after the first World War, and wrote this after receiving a parcel of medicines from Yehuda Ronder.

You expect me to say "thank you" for the medicines I received from you. Be patient, however, before you hear these words from me. My thanks will not flee from you, and I shall not remain your debtor. I shall not even ask you how much this all cost, together with postage and packaging, and how much money I should send you. I am not poor, thank God, and you are not richer than I am.

When you read this introduction, you will surely think that, since I have been lying in hospital for a year, I have become witless – God forbid! – or demented. Neither this nor that, but while writing to you, I suddenly remembered a story from the distant past in Keidan.

This happened about 1908 or 1909. Our barber shop (if you could call it a barber shop), was situated in a house belonging to Yasse Deitsch, and exactly opposite us was a pharmacy run by a Jew called Kamai, in a house belonging to Blumberg. This was before he was appointed Rabbi with us. He was a very talented Jew, maybe the most talented in the whole region. He was a highly learned man and surpassed ten other rabbis together in knowledge.

One winter day his son, who was helping him in the pharmacy, entered and addressed my father. "Reb Alter", he said, "Reb Kamai sent me to ask you please to lend him ten bundles of wood. When he buys wood, he'll return them to you immediately." My father, may he rest in peace, took the key of the storeroom out of his pocket, gave it to him, and told him to choose ten bundles as he pleased. "It can happen," my father said to himself; "As it is written in Ecclesiastes: '...nor bread for the wise[94]'."

A few days passed. The youth entered once more, and told my father that Reb Kamai had asked that my father come by the next time he happened to be near his house. Reb Kamai had something for him. When father entered his house Reb Kamai said, "Sit down Reb Alter, let's chat a little."

"I owe you ten bundles of wood. About this I have a request for you: Give them to me as a present. Ten bundles of wood are indeed ten bundles, but I have no other choice than to ask you to give them to me as a gift...."

I should point out here that my father wasn't stupid; to tell the truth, he was very clever. However, he had one failing in that he had little education. He had mastered six or seven languages, and spoke them well. His tongue was properly attached to his palate, but without grammar. In other words, he didn't know why one should say this but not that. Yet he had a feeling for how things should be said, without being able to explain why. And so, because father wasn't stupid, he stayed seated, open-mouthed, and looked at him. As the Talmud says, "What does this teach us?" Kamai asks for the ten bundles as a gift? He looked at him and smiled...

"Rabbi," my father said to him; "What's there to talk about here? After all, I didn't come here to ask for the bundles back. I came because you asked me to, not to collect a debt. Use them, that is, burn them for your own enjoyment. It's not worth talking about."

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[94] Ecclesiastes 9:11

"That means," Kamai responded, "that you have given me the wood as a present. We are therefore agreed! If so, I also want to give you a present: ten bundles of wood."

My father said, "Thank you, but I still have enough wood to last me a few weeks."

"No," Kamai replied; "You must take ten bundles of wood from me, I give them to you as a present. Yankele", he said to his son, "Put ten bundles of wood in Reb Alter's store room".

My father, may he rest in peace, was still astonished... "What does this teach us?" once again.

When Kamai saw that my father still didn't understand, he told him, "Well then, I'll explain my reasoning."

"We Jews have a great and wonderful Torah. Without this Torah, the memory of our people would have vanished long ago. The Torah unites all Jews, wherever they are. Look, it is written in the Torah that if a man is needy, and borrows money or something else from you, and you lend it to him, you are forbidden to charge him interest. The borrower must not pay you interest, because interest is usury, as simple as that. You see, in the course of time, if he cannot repay the loan, the interest can become larger than the prinicpal. The interest continues to grow and becomes usurious...".

"Now look here, please", said Kamai to my father, "how the Torah cares for everyone. You are allowed to receive a pledge when you lend money to someone, but on condition that, if you received a pillow as a pledge, you are forbidden to keep it the whole night, because the borrower won't have anything to sleep on. You must, therefore, return the pillow to him for the night, but you are allowed to take it back in the morning until the next night. The same principle applies to tools used during the day; for example, a pot used for cooking meals. You must return it to the borrower in the morning, and you can take it back again for the whole night."

"Do you see now, Reb Alter?" said Kamai, "what I mean when I ask that you give me the ten bundles of wood as a present, while I give you back ten bundles as a present? Indeed, when I took ten bundles of wood from you, you didn't measure or weigh them. Neither did I when I repaid the debt. I didn't measure or weigh. It is thus possible that one of us took interest from the other: for example, your pieces of wood may have been thicker and longer than mine, or vice versa. Now," said Kamai, "you can fully understand me. When you give me a present, and I give you a present in return, everything is equal, and no interest is involved."

That is to say, are you giving me the medicines as a present? ...I therefore hope I will soon be able to leave the house and also give you something as a present...

If you should visit the Ninth Fort[95], I ask that you stand in my name before our martyrs and honor their memory with a minute of silence. The same if you visit Chaim [Ronder]'s grave at the Aleksot [cemetery.]

Now, I can thank you very much for the medicines.

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[95] "A military facility near Kovno, where more than 50,000 people, most of them Jews, were murdered by the Nazis and their local collaborators."

Encounter With a Vanished Town *Keidan Yizkor book pp 164-166*

Daniel Ben-Nachum (Prochovnik), Kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Based on their frequent descriptions in our literature, the towns and villages of Lithuania were apparently alike in appearance and character. The market square in the center, filled with noisy trade and bargaining, especially on market days, with its large shops, pharmacy and hotel with gilded sign boards, and small stalls on the periphery. A main street, the backbone of the town, on which official public buildings stand proudly. In the evenings amorous couples stroll along the street, while on certain corners members of the various political parties and movements crowd the sidewalks. The local aristocrat's ancient palace garden has turned into a park for the public's enjoyment. The lanes radiating from the street become dusty in the summer and drown in mud in autumn. From the low houses, so hospitable to guests, come the sounds of labor, clanging from morning until night. On the outskirts of town the fields and fruit gardens descend to a river (In Keidan, this was the deep, fast-flowing Neviazhe) with groves along its banks. The roads lead to far-off villages and fields with crosses at the junctions. Outside the town, there was always some kind of mountain, the size of a modest hill, attracting young hearts with its shadows and hiding places. In the town center stood the "nonsense" (our name for the church) and beyond it the eye-catching great synagogue with its courtyard. Farther on stood small religious study-houses.
The excited voices of the Torah students, their whispers magnified into hurricanes of sound, or crying in prayer; the joyful tumult of schoolchildren heading home; the energetic Zionist songs arising from the youth movements' clubhouses and the fiery *hora* dances that disturbed the neighbors' sleep; a love song on the lips of a young girl bent over a sewing machine; hymns of revolution sung by apprentices in workshops. These jumbled sounds accompanied us in towns and villages in every corner of Lithuania, in Jewish communities that no longer exist.

Still, each town and village had individual traits that made it distinct. Just as each human being has a unique face and soul, upon which history and experience have left their marks, so every community had its collective local spirit, revealed not only in collected memories and communal records, but also in its traditions, deeply rooted across generations. It manifests itself in the character of its sons and daughters. This spirit hovers over the old buildings; even the trees and stones are impregnated with it. It is in the shadows of the shrubs and the fences, alive and breathing, until the community has ceased to exist.

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The special character of Keidan was obvious and undeniable. It declared itself anew on every visit to the place and every encounter with its people. While a serious analysis and precise definition may be elusive, we can see in it a blend of different sources: folk roots, hard work and dedication to social welfare on one hand, love of Torah and devotion to Hebrew education on the other.

Some towns in Lithuania could be praised for the great Torah scholars who had lived there and studied in their famous yeshivas. There were those that took pride in their great men of learning, proficient in the world's wisdom. Some produced business leaders and craftsmen, while others sent their sons to gain fame in distant places.

Keidan was proud: Its people were said to boast of their origins. They were proud of their handicrafts and merchandise, their gardeners and vegetable growers, their squashes and cucumbers; they were even nicknamed "Keidan cucumbers." They also took pride in their Torah learning and education, and, eventually, in bringing their children up to be Zionist pioneers. The town was blessed with all seven virtues.

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Looking through ancient records, we find deep roots for these characteristics. In an old notebook of "The Tradesmen's Society of the Holy Congregation of Keidan" from 1804, we

find that the society had issued a ban against compromising with communal leaders. Why such severity? This is based on an incident that bore witness to the low standing of tradesmen in those days, and the rebellion of the tailors of Keidan, who refused to submit to oppression and would not forgive communal leaders for insulting them.

From ancient times, tradesmen had been forbidden to wear velvet *yarmulkes* or fur "*shtreimel*" hats, and allowed only Manchester cotton *yarmulkes* and plain hats. One Shabbat, two tailors dared to appear in the synagogue wearing velvet *yarmulkes*. They were immediately thrown out. The following Shabbat a number of tailors appeared in the synagogue wearing velvet *yarmulkes*. During Passover week the community elders met and decided to flog all the tailors, from the youngest to the oldest, with whips. The young ones were to receive 10 lashes and the older ones 25 lashes each, so that they, their children and grandchildren would remember and never dare such a thing again. The town was ruled by the local count. His guards were sought out and late one Friday night when the tailors were fast asleep, they were brought in one by one, stripped and flogged without a word. The older ones received 25 lashes and the juniors 10 (according to "Historical Writings" by Simon Dubnov).

This story – of a poor but proud man who wouldn't give up his velvet cap, the symbol of the learned and well-connected, of influence and wealth – was passed down in Keidan from generation to generation. If one person embodied that spirit, it would be Moshe Leib Lilienblum, son of a poor Keidan barrel-maker. During all his spiritual wanderings and social struggles, he remained firmly rooted in the masses of his people. He worried about their physical needs and put the task of improving their lives ahead of the spiritual goals of those planning to make *aliya*. "When eighty or ninety per cent or more of our people live in misery and extreme poverty, grasping right and left for a slice of bread to survive, I'm unable to listen to poems about empty hearts and genius insights," was how he stated his opinion, with uncompromising severity.

As one of the forerunners of the movement for national rebirth and the settlement of Eretz Israel, he believed their essence lay in productive labour, especially in agriculture. He was a cold-eyed realist – a "*mitnaged*[96]" – who reasoned logically against excessive idealism and romanticism. He saw Zionism predominantly as "the task of creating settlements over several generations. It is impossible to build such an edifice [as the Jewish state] in a short time, in the way that the pious call for rebuilding the Temple on Yom Kippur."

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It is no coincidence that Keidan was the only town (and actually a small one by the standards of our times) apart from the capital, Kovno, in which a literary Hebrew periodical was published for a time. Hebrew books were also printed there. It wasn't a coincidence that on the outskirts of Keidan, in Pelednagiai, the first Zionist pioneer training farm in Lithuania, called *"Kibbush"* –was founded. It long served as a center for the movement and a landmark for many of its members.

One of the largest branches of *Hashomer Hatzair*, which excelled in its steadfast and deep devotion to Zionist pioneering ideals, also arose here. These qualities also benefited its members in times of crisis and upheaval – a combination of pioneering rebelliousness and conservatism regarding educational values, faithfulness to their roots, with a layer of typical Keidaner stubbornness.

No wonder then that this branch saw the highest share of its members realize the dream of *aliya.* Perhaps that is why it was chosen to host the first congress of movement pioneers, at which the establishment was announced of the first Lithuanian *Hashomer Hatzair* kibbutz, now Beit Zera. And it is likely symbolic that the flag of the branch, which was miraculously saved by one of its members after much adventure and many wanderings, has been brought to Beit Zera, and is now preserved in the "Keidan Room" of the kibbutz, a silent witness to the continuity of the chain.

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[96] An opponent of ecstatic religious movements such as hasidism.

My Birthplace, Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 167-168*

Shmuel Goldblatt, Kibbutz Kfar Giladi

Translated by Bella Golubchik

My memories of the town of my birth, Keidan, begin at the end of the First World War, when the first refugees began returning to their town.

Our family was among the refugees who reached Vilna. Although I was a toddler, only four or five years old, I remember we lodged in a large synagogue with many hundreds of our fellow citizens. I was sick with German measles and had a very high fever. The harrowing sights from our way back to Keidan are engraved in my memory forever. Human corpses and animal carcasses were strewn by the roadside, and smoke was still rising from the roofs of the towns and villages we passed. I was wrapped in rags in a horse-drawn wagon. I was the youngest in the family and I remember my brothers and sisters, my father and mother of blessed memory, helping to push the cart uphill, and burning straw under the horse's stomach to make it pull harder at such places. When we arrived at our house in Keidan, my first impression, as I remember it now, was of our small yard opposite the synagogue. We found icons and images of Christian saints hanging on the wall. When I tried to play with them I was sorely punished by my father, not understanding why.

After a few weeks we began to settle down and I began attending *cheder*. During my first year the *cheder* was in the big synagogue, a large, lofty building with high windows and two small side rooms near the entrance for daily *minyans*.

Before sunrise, as the last stars faded from the heavens, my father used to wake us up to go to *cheder,* in summer, winter, heat or rain or snow. I was still little and I wanted to continue sleeping and dreaming about little angels, about a world filled with imagination and illusion, about games and hiding places. And suddenly: Get up! I sleepwalked all the way to *cheder*, the snow crackling underfoot and a kerchief covering my ears lest they freeze, god forbid. In the synagogue I usually found another five or six "gentlemen" like myself, half asleep and crying. More than once we suffered smacks on the hands or posterior, with a stick or a switch when we failed to pay attention to what the rabbi was saying.

Later when the *cheder* moved to the rabbi's house, the atmosphere changed a bit. We weren't confined by the four high walls of the big synagogue. Here we sometimes enjoyed a few comforting, affectionate words from the rabbi's wife; sometimes she even treated us to homemade cherry preserves.

I remember once, when I was sitting next to the long table, exchanging sweets wrappers with my friends, the rabbi caught me and wanted to give me a hiding. It was a Friday, and the rebbetzin had prepared a pot of *tsimmes*, which stood by the oven door. In the course of my escape, I bumped it and the pot overturned onto the floor. That was a black Friday in the rabbi's house, especially for me. He pursued me to the high bank of the Neviazhe river. From there I ran downhill. Jews were approaching or leaving the bath house, still sweating or already washed in their Shabbat clothes, others carrying buckets of water on poles in preparation for the Sabbath. Everything was coming alive. The Shabbat atmosphere filled the town, while I was running towards the public bath without looking left or right. Around me were green fields, stalks of wheat waving in the wind, the sound of cows mooing. I could see the church steeples rising across the river, could suddenly hear a train whistle from afar, the sound of bicycles rattling on the cobblestones, and I was daydreaming. How beautiful you are, how pastoral, my native town.

Years passed. *Cheder* was replaced by public primary school, and afterwards by the progymnasium. The modern world invaded Keidan: amateur stage productions, cinema, the first scouts and *Hashomer Hatzair*. Great changes occurred then in the lives of Jewish youth. And who can talk about Keidan without mentioning Count Totleben's park? On the way to the

train station you passed huge trees on the side of the road. It took eight lads my size to encircle such a tree. A canal through the middle of the park with numerous paths and rich, well-tended vegetation, with hidden corners where young lads and girls sought a bit of privacy, and the military town orchestra performed each week. And every Saturday afternoon? The whole town strolled on the bridge over the Neviazhe: young and old, some with side curls and some with shaven cheeks, happy joyful voices echoed the length of the bridge. You felt as if all those strolling were one family, solving all the world's problems.

On Fridays and festivals, when you went out in the evening to relax, to renew your strength and breathe the cool air, you could walk the length of the main street, Langer Gas, many times. You could stop at the small shop windows, which you already knew by heart. On the way you passed the walls and gate of the jail in the center of town, where your heart had been gripped with fear as a young lad, then you'd pass by the town's only movie house, until you reached the military barracks, before turning back for another stroll.

I was sixteen and a half when I left my birthplace. I moved to Riga, a big European city, with its lights and large public gardens and its variety of colors and cultural institutions, but I found no rest there. I was drawn back to my town and its scenery, its gardens and its people. Every year at Passover I would visit my parents, who had remained in Keidan. As the train approached the station, my heart began to pound in anticipation of standing again in that small place and meeting those same familiar people. The carriage with its rubber wheels hitched to two horses transported you to town. In a while, you passed the flourmill and the military barracks, the cultivated vegetable gardens and the town hospital, before reaching Langer Gas, with its little houses. And from the shop doors and windows a thousand familiar faces, friends and companions from days gone by, pop out to you.

Years have passed. The Holocaust didn't spare this quiet town, despite its good relations with neighbors. Its Jews were annihilated. Friends, acquaintances and everything dear were slaughtered. The synagogues were overturned and the scenic places destroyed. The heart aches and there is no peace.

Forty-two years have passed since I last visited and saw my birthplace. When I recall it it is as if I am recalling my first love, whom I will never see again but will remember forever.

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Memories *Keidan Yizkor book, page 169-170*
Sholem Dat (Johannesburg)

First published in "Lita," (p. 1475) by the Jewish-Lithuanian Cultural Society Inc. 1951. Translated by Andrew Cassel.

Keidan is one of the oldest cities in Lithuania, and her Jewish community was also one of the first.

Keidan was originally a small fishing settlement, which was started in the mid-14th century by the Neviazhe river, at the spot where the Obele, Dotnuvėlė and Smilga streams flow into it.

The settlement at first had the name of its founder, Kazdan. Later it began to be called by its Lithuanian name, "Kedainiai".

In the 15th century Keidan grew considerably. In the last quarter of that century the Jewish community began to organize. But it was short-lived, because the Keidan Jews along with all the Jews of Lithuania in 1495 were forced into exile by order of the Grand Duke Alexander. When the Jews were permitted to return in 1503, not many Jews evidently settled in Keidan.

Christopher Radziwill, Lithuanian prince and *voivode*[97] of Vilna, in 1614 received half of Keidan as a dowry from his father in law, Stanislav Kishko. (In 1490 the Lithuanian-Russian family Kishko received all of Keidan as a gift from the Polish king, Casimir IV.) Later, he purchased the other half. Wishing to increase commerce in Keidan, he issued an order, according to which Jews were granted civil and religious rights. This, naturally, attracted a great number of Jews. The new immigrants came mostly from Germany.

Janusz Radziwill later confirmed all the privileges the Jews had had from his father Christopher. In his time, around the middle of the 17th century, Jews occupied the most important positions in the town's economic life. They were involved in wine-making and brewing, money lending, farming and various crafts.

With small interruptions, because of various wars which the town endured and because of epidemics, such as cholera, the Jewish population in Keidan began to develop more and more. However, in the 1880's, Jews from Keidan first began to emigrate, mainly to the United States.

Keidan prided itself on its lineage – and a lineage it had. For example, Keidan had the oldest pharmacy in all of the Baltics. It had been in existence more than 275 years, while the oldest pharmacy in Moscow is only 200 years old.

Keidan possessed an old, brick synagogue – done in an old style, with a beautifully carved ark, with clocks and tablets, with beautiful, although now barely visible paintings. Alongside the synagogue, still standing, is the "lock-up" where the community used to confine criminals.

Keidan consistently had great rabbis and outstanding scholars. The Vilna Gaon studied there in his youth, with the noted rabbi, Reb David, son of Reb Yehezkel Katzenellenbogen, the author of *"Knesset Yehezkel."*

The well-known writer M.L. Lilienblum was also a native of Keidan. The town was always full of sages and scribes. (A fine work about Keidan was published by Boruch Chaim Cassel in the book "*Keidan*," New York, 1930.)

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It is now many years since I left my town of Keidan. I am now decades away from my native town, living in big, modern Johannesburg – and yet a deep longing won't stop piercing my heart for the little tiled rooftops of Keidan, for the moss that stopped up the winter windows,

[97] Originally a Slavic term for "warlord," it came to mean a local governor or provincial ruler.

for the *beit hamidrash* (study house), for all the good and pious Jews of the town.

Here, the in the centrally heated apartments I am reminded often of the simple brown or white tiled ovens in which people steamed their *cholents* [Shabbat stews]. Family and neighbors would sit around in the long winter evenings, and especially on the pleasant Friday nights, or at twilight on Shabbat, talking about world politics and describing the wonders of America and Africa.

It can't be forgotten, how in the freezing winter cold, Jewish mothers would chop out a hole in the Smilga to soak their laundry. I can still hear, exactly as if it were today, the songs of the women kneading dough in the matzo bakery.

And who doesn't remember the military conscription days in the town, when Christian draftees would celebrate all over town with music and singing, and trembling Jewish boys would sit with their hearts pounding, that God forbid they should be taken "into the soldiers"?

In Keidan it was customary that, when a Jewish boy was before the draft board, he would signal through the window to his waiting mother whether or not he was "taken." Drawing the hand across the throat meant: Slaughtered! More than one mother broke out crying, "My tree, my hero, my breadwinner."

It is interesting, by the way, to recall that the famous enemy of the Jews, Russia's prime minister Stolypin, was for a time the chairman of the draft board in Keidan. (He had a farm not far from the town.) And, not to compare, but Morris Winchevsky[98] also had a connection with the Keidan draft board: In 1877 he stood before it and was rejected, having sufficiently "starved" himself beforehand.

In 1914 a great fire broke out in Keidan, which destroyed the town from the bridge to Long Street, from the market to the synagogue yard. This was a kind of prelude to the First World War, which also brought disaster to the Jews of Keidan, who on May 16 [1915] received an order giving them two days to leave the town. The expulsion sent a large proportion of Keidan Jews to Vilna, while others ended up deep inside Russia.

Returning from the expulsion, the Jews started rebuilding their destroyed and ruined town, showing their trust in the good will of a newly independent Lithuania – a trust that was soon to be totally betrayed.

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[98] Morris Winchevsky (1856–1932), Jewish poet, playwright and socialist, active in England and the U.S.

The Big Celebration *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 171-177*

Hirsh Bloshtein

Originally published in "Birobidzhaner Shtern," October 1970. Translated by Bella Golubchik

I once had a friend. We were born in the same town, on the same street and in the same year. We were together through our childhood years and the dawn of our youth; and though fate, which was not always kind to us, led us on different paths to different cities and different lands, we almost never lost our heartfelt connection. I say "almost" because, during the most difficult years of the civil war, we somehow did lose it. Yet when we met again, our meeting was so joyful, like the sky that becomes blue again after a storm, even bluer than before.
But I will describe this meeting later on. Many stories have been written with surprise endings. My story ended exactly fifty years ago, in the autumn of 1920. We are now in its jubilee year. Apart from universal historical dates, everyone has their own personal anniversaries. These personal dates are sometimes common to thousands of people of one generation, and worthy of public discussion. It seems to me that this date of mine should be among them.

But let us return to the beginning. Because there is no end without a beginning ...

My friend lived in Moscow for fifty years, on Bolshaya Spasskaya street. Some time ago he was transferred to a new dwelling. His widow, Klavdia Konstantinovna, just recently sent me a picture of the tombstone she erected at his grave, in the cemetery in Vostriakov. She stressed that, before dying, almost his final words were, "It seems I won't see Hirshele again...ever."

My friend's name was Mordechai Muller. Why do I emphasize his name? Because it is not just his personality, but also his name that is of interest, not only to me but likely also to other Jews interested in the history of Jewish literature, its literary names and its writers' pseudonyms.

In the "*Lexicon of Jewish Literature, Journalism and Philology*" by Zalman Reisen, 1928 edition, it says that I published my first poem "*Dawn*" in 1912, in the Vilna periodical "*Life and Science*" (Nos 7-8) under the pen name "Mordechai Muller".

I am obliged to say here that, at age 17, when I published the above poem, I was a very sensitive youth. I was unsure how the poem would be received – I feared the editor would ignore me, or would mail me a caustic rejection. I feared that if this became known, everyone in town would mock me.

My friend liked the poem and gave me his name to use. "Let them laugh at me," he said. "No one will ever find out from me that I am you..." He even gave his own address for the reply. I will never forget how happy he was when the editor's reply came. He came running, bearing a celebratory bottle of liquor...

With this I could conclude the tale of my pen name, but for the sake of a possible future bibliographer I must add a few words. I never again, in any literary work in any area or any type of literature, used the pseudonym "Mordechai Muller." All the poems that can be found in the Jewish press during the early years after the October Revolution, and which are signed Mordechai Muller, were written by my childhood best friend, who found his last resting place in the Vostriakov cemetery in Moscow. He was a great poet, through and through, and was exceptionally talented in poetic technique. Yet he only wrote poems in the first years after the Revolution. Why did he throw away his harp? Because ...

No. I am not writing a lexicon here. I am only writing an autobiography. Let us therefore return to the actual story of the event, the big celebration that gives its name to this article.

* * *

The big celebration was conceived and prepared by a few boys and girls who had grown up in my Lithuanian town of Keidan, the town that heard my first cry and that tearfully accompanied me into the great world at the tragic end of my youth.
The oldest among us, the shoemaker's son Meishke Alter, had just turned twenty. Keilke, the youngest, had not yet turned seventeen. We all lived on Smilga Street, a poor, humble street, with its low, wooden houses and its adjoining alleys named for the communal bathhouse, the synagogue and the ridge where the poorhouse stood – lanes even more narrow, grey and low than their larger sister.

Our fathers never sat by the synagogue's eastern wall, nor by the table where communal affairs were conducted. Many of our fathers typically ate the same thin groat-porridge with skimmed milk and black bread on Shabbat as they did on weekdays. Before Passover they would walk to the house of the community board, heads bowed, to receive a few coins of charity in order to bake a little matzo. Wordlessly, they would place the coins before our mothers, who counted them in silence. It is hard to say which were more plentiful on those bare tables, the coins or the women's pain-filled tears.

We young people were already living "independent" lives. Some worked with their own fathers, some had just begun learning what it means to work for other fathers. Some, like the writer of these lines, gave private lessons for a few meager *kopeks*, and some, like Zelig the tinker's daughter Keilke, looked after the children of the town's wealthy. We "green" teenagers earned too little to make any difference in the budgets of our large families.

Thinking back on those days from a distance of 56 years, I feel that I am looking through two lenses, both magnifying and shrinking what I see with head and heart. Through the close-up lens all is grey, miserably mundane and heavy, but when I look from afar, yearning awakes and it seems like a painting, which one should view from a certain distance. The lines are not so sharp; every brushstroke is not so distinct. Either way, the heart clenches, and so we look back, when our maturity confronts the years of our youth, dreamy, smiling days meet fading shadows...

We all read, some more, some less, but we all dreamed increasingly beautiful dreams, for ourselves and for the world. What besides the unrelenting hunger and distress of Tsarist Russia could produce so many dreamers? Yet most of us were aware even then that simply dreaming was not enough. Out of those grey, pain-filled days the big celebration could come only after much sacrifice.

Nearly every one of us had a family member who was behind bars or in Siberia. The favorite songs in Smilga Street were "A Letter to Mother," Nomberg's lullaby, ("From Siberia your father sends you greetings, my child") and "Play, Play, Wicked Winds" by Avraham Reisen. Also "*Slushay*" ["Listen"] translated by An-sky to Yiddish, the ballad of Hirsh Lekert and other struggle songs... but ...

We were not only very poor then, but also very young and we wanted to celebrate with our pals, with wine, dances, song and games, all in the "bosom of nature." And Keidan possesses an abundance of such heart-warming natural surroundings. We were familiar with them almost from the cradle. The town is surrounded by rivers, and beyond them lay pastures, fields and pine forests. Right behind the train station, which is situated near the town, a thick forest, called a "*bor*" begins, stretching for miles. Here in the "bor" the festivities were planned. On the way our friends were supposed to march through Smilga Street playing music and carrying a placard, bearing the message: "We are young, we want to celebrate ... we have time enough to work..." with all who wished to join the parade as it passed.

The main designer of this "program" was Mordechai Muller – also known as Alter the *badkhn's*[99] son Motl.

The idea of the big celebration was born in Motl's mind after a "white" June night, as he was escorting his girlfriend home at dawn. The white nights, in the northern regions of Lithuania,

[99] A jester or comedian, traditionally hired to entertain at weddings.

the nights of May and June, are not nights at all. One corner of the heavens still wears the purple imprint of the sun that has only just disappeared, even as the other corner opens its grey-blue gates for the rising sun, veiled in rose and gold. In those few weeks the day never gets enough sleep. It wanders like a drunkard, in whose eyes there seems to be a joyful, happy insanity. Young people experience this more than anyone, although traces of it remain even in old age. This is the wonder of the beginning that remains at the end, the vague remnants of a melody after a song has disappeared.

Motl accompanied his girlfriend home but didn't go home himself. His heart, like the dawn, was filled with love, yearning and melody. He felt so good he could almost have wept, so he left town again and turned to the dew-laden pastures, with their intoxicating smells. As doors began to open in Smilga Street, he drummed gently with his fingers on the windowpane by my sleeping-bench. I heard him and, surprised at the early hour, I asked him, with fear more in my eyes than in my voice, "What happened?"

He answered with one word: "Open!" His smile was so lovely and joyous that I swung open the windows immediately and Motl entered the room at once. The windows in the edifices of our dreams were lofty, but the small windows of our dwellings were nearly on the ground. We didn't fear thieves much, we inhabitants of Smilga Street.

And without relinquishing his smile, eyes peering into the distance, Motl said, "Hirshele, I have just heard the song of the Earth. Not with my ears. Put your ear to my chest. I have felt and celebrated the festival of the Earth. I have heard her singing and I have accompanied her."

And he laid out for me his plans for the "big celebration" with great enthusiasm. I was the first to whom he revealed his grand plan. The second was his father, Alter (Bentzi) the *badkhn*. Motl never kept any secrets from his father, though his father was also his employer at that time. He owned a barber shop, which he ran by himself until his eldest son Chaimke grew up, and after him, Motl.

* * *

It is only right to dedicate a few additional lines to Alter, my townsman. Characters like him were not uncommon in Lithuania. It seems to me they have not received enough attention and have been given scant notice in our literature. Perhaps I only think so because I am a Litvak, and I love not only Lithuania's landscape but also its people. I believe I can be forgiven this provincial affection – it is only natural.
Alter the *badkhn* was a man of many talents. He was the best barber in town; he was the best makeup artist, not only for amateur theatrical groups, but also for the professional theatre companies that occasionally visited the town; he excelled in reading music and played just about every instrument; he was always invited to play with the professional *klezmorim* who serenaded at aristocrats' weddings on the surrounding estates, and he was the most renowned *badkhn* in our large town, which numbered more than 6,000 Jewish souls. Why do I say renowned? Because there was a second *badkhn*, Dovid the painter. It was typical for Lithuanian Jews of the time to have multiple trades, yet they still had great difficulty earning "water for porridge." As they used to say in Lithuania in those days, "Many trades, few blessings."

Alter the *badkhn* once explained this to me in his own fashion: "You understand Hirshele, the Almighty calls one of his servants, an angel, in the morning, gives him a large loaf of bread and says to him: 'Hurry and give this loaf to Alter the barber, they are awaiting you anxiously.' The angel comes to my barber shop and asks after me. He is told: 'There is no one here like that. There is someone with that name, but he is a *badkhn*. Look for him at Reb Moshe's, where a wedding is taking place.' The angel goes there, but still doesn't find the person he is seeking. Someone whispers to him: 'I think the person you are looking for left yesterday with a group of *klezmorim*, for a party at Pan Kochavitzky's manor.' In short, even an angel gets weary. He returns to heaven with the loaf of bread."

I mentioned Dovid the *badkhn* before, because of a certain tale (I hope the reader will forgive me for trying his patience). Dovid was a traditional religious Jew. He wore a long black overcoat, he had long side curls and a long grey beard, and was skinny and stooped with red-rimmed, ailing eyes. He was generally asked to the weddings of Jews as traditional as he was. Dovid was an expert in entertaining the bride and squeezing tears from the congregation.

Alter was his exact opposite: he stood erect, was not lean and was of average height, with wise, smiling brown eyes that were somewhat sadly mocking. Clean-shaven, he was a walking treasury of Jewish sayings, amusing stories, folksongs and poems by Frug, Rosenfeld and Edelstadt[100]. He knew how to get a laugh. He was invited to homes where they were not pedantic about prayers and dirges, and not to the homes of the rich and religious. It was common knowledge that when Alter visited the courts of the "squires" he wouldn't deny himself a little slice of pork. And in the eyes of the rich Jews, Alter had another "stain:" His eldest son Chaim had participated in the town's self-defense during Russia's first revolutionary wave, from 1903 to 1905.

I was then a lad of about nine years, when Alter the *badkhn's* son Chaim became the town hero. It was during the miserable Russo-Japanese War. That day the town was filled with conscripts and members of the army units who had the right to bivouac for 24 hours in the towns they passed through.

That night, one of the officers burst into a Jewish house and tried to rape a girl. Hearing the girl's screams, Chaim came running and shot the officer dead on the spot. The entire town barricaded itself behind doors and gates, all certain that a pogrom would follow. Lithuanian and Russian acquaintances from the surrounding villages reached our house and those of other tradespeople, offering shelter in their own homes to their friends, the workers.

The army and local police officials searched many houses. They searched for Chaim, but he was already over the border that same night.

Motl greatly resembled his father and big brother. In appearance he was almost a copy of his father, as pictured in the wedding photo that hung on the wall. Motl was also like him inside, spiritually, although one step above him in one aspect – reflecting the spirit of the times.

They were not only father and son, they were also friends. That is why Motl immediately told his father about his plans for the "big celebration" – and immediately received a bucket of cold water, in the form of mockery combined with a great deal of anger.

"You are my heir, you are a great statesman, a veritable Lord Disraeli, in addition to which you are smarter than the whole world, the wise son of the Haggadah. What a brilliant scheme! Madame Linda, she of the weird hairstyle, can certainly get you permission for such a celebration, since she is the police chief's mistress. And do you know what else she is? An informer. She will be delighted to help assemble such a large group of boys and girls, to have their pictures taken by the police. The chief will reward her generously; everyone will sing Reisen's 'Play, Play, Wicked Winds' and the program Madame Linda submits for approval will carry your name. So in sum, what is this joy that overcomes you?

Motl didn't interrupt his father, which was how he always behaved with him. He stood with bowed head, only the colour in his cheeks changed from moment to moment. They alternately reddened and paled, but he answered not a word.

Motl got a second helping that day from the young teacher, Ester Jaffe. She too was from Smilga Street. She worked in the Jewish government school, where most of the children were from Smilga Street. A half day in the Russian practical school[101] and a half day in the Jewish *Talmud Torah.* Ester Charna loved her pupils very much.

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[100] Shimon Frug, Morris Rosenfeld and David Edelstadt, popular Yiddish poets and essayists of the late 19th century.

[101] Called an "*uchilishche,*" it offered instruction to young people in trades such as carpentry, tailoring or

She listened to her former pupil, Motl, as he laid his plan before her, and also his father's reply. Motl was always open and sincere. Ester answered him briefly: "Motele, I always thought you were smart and very successful ... and your father... anyhow, in short, I have overestimated you and disparaged your father... Apologize to him for me."

Ester Charna Jaffe ... I feel pain when I recall her name, as she was my friend and a wonderful person. Near the end of June, 1941, when the German fascists overran Kaunas, Ester was among five hundred members of the Jewish intelligentsia gathered into a hall, where Lithuanian nationals attacked and fatally beat them with clubs.

The big celebration never took place, but the longing for it continued for a very long time. Our daily lives were so mundane, so difficult. The Shabbats and holidays we spent, sitting by poor, sad tables, listening to our mothers chant "God of Abraham" and other prayers, were no happier than our grey weekdays.

* * *

On August 1, 1914, the First World War broke out. The battle front rapidly approached our town. A large group of our youth were quickly conscripted, Motl among them. Arrests became more and more frequent. Every night brought raids at different homes in Smilga Street, with people led away in handcuffs. The cycle of persecution and black terror, the mortal fear of decrees hung constantly over our heads. And then it happened: Expulsion from Lithuania! The Tsar's high military command ordered half a million Jews away from areas near the front. In a few hours, we Keidaners were also forced to leave the place where we had put down roots for hundreds of years. Trains, most of them with locked doors, transported the town's inhabitants far away, across Russia's enormous spaces. (I dedicated a large portion of my novel "*Homeless*" to the expulsion from Lithuania and to the fate of its people.)
Our group fell apart completely. To this day I have seen almost none of my dear friends, who longed for the "big celebration." I say almost, because there were a few exceptions, and Motl was among them.

We met by chance in 1920 in Moscow. This happened during one of the happier days in the land of our birth. I can't recall the exact date on which I met with Motl; but I do remember that it took place after November 17, when the Red Army had conquered Perekop, ending the battle with Wrangel[102]. The young Soviet Union, which had been tested in blood and fire, celebrated its victory and Moscow, frozen, covered in snow, ill lit, breathed a warm sigh, and its miserable dull electric bulbs spread such a brilliant light that it shone all over the world....

In those same days, spontaneous demonstrations broke out, with flags, slogans, festivities and music – some by the Communist youth.

On one of those days, I came out of the building that housed the Ministry of Education, where I had been given a position as an educator at a children's home in Vitebsk. I moved quickly in order to get warm, and rushing through the streets I encountered one such joyous demonstration coming out of a side street. I joined the procession and quickly adjusted my steps to its pace and my voice to the singing. Looking around after a minute, a few rows behind me I saw Motl, wearing the long coat of the Red Army and a cavalry hat. We glanced at one another for a second in astonishment. I continued walking until the procession stopped, smiling non-stop with both my eyes and my lips. We embraced each other with our eyes for a long while.

And when we reached our destination, before we had managed to tell each other about our relatives and about our personal affairs here in Moscow, Motl proclaimed, with tears in his eyes and a joyous tremble in his voice, a sentence I have carried in my heart these whole fifty years. This is it:

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metalwork.

[102] At Perekop, on the isthmus connecting Crimea to Ukraine, from November 7 to 15, 1920, the Red Army defeated the White Army, led by Pyotr Wrangel.

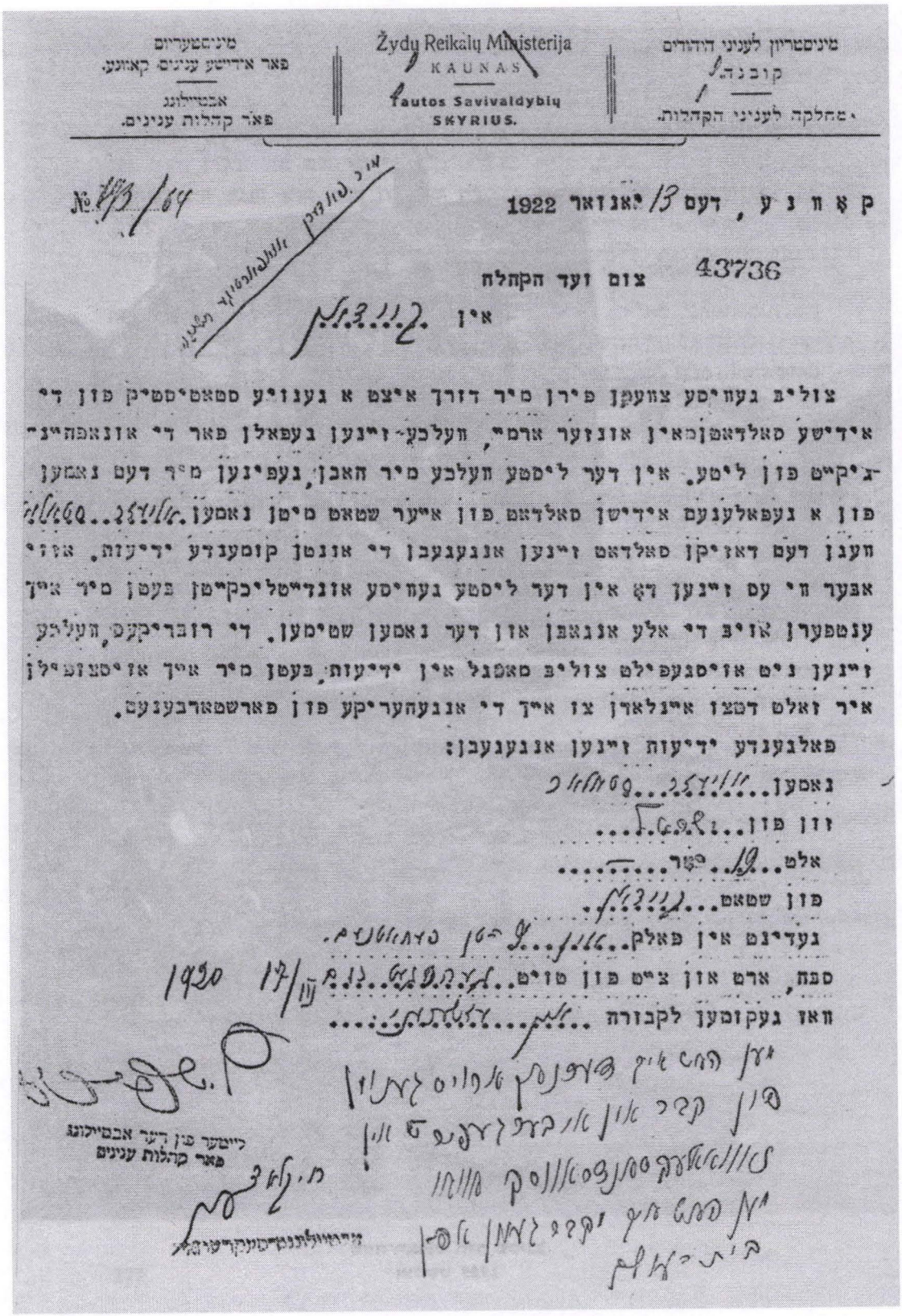
"Hirshele, say *shehecheyanu!*[103] It has arrived – our big celebration! We finally managed it – and look at where!"

To this very day, when I see youth parading on one of our holidays, my heart is flooded with warm feelings, like a green wave of spring.

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[103] A Jewish blessing, thanking God for having reached the present moment, typically said on holidays and joyous occasions.

Photos from Keidan Yizkor book following p 176



מינסטעריום
פאר אידיש ענינס קאונס.
אבטיילונג
פאר קהלות ענינס.

Žydų Reikalų Ministerija
KAUNAS
Vietos Savivaldybių
SKYRIUS.

מינסטעריון לעניני היהודים
קובנה.
מחלקה לעניני הקהלות.

№ 43736/64

קאוונע, דעם 13 יאנואר 1922

43736

צום וועד הקהלה

אין

צוליב געוויסע צושטענד פירן מיר דזרך אויצט א געניוע סטאטיסטיק פון די אידישע פאלדאטן־אין אונזער ארמי, וועלכע־זיינען געפאלן פאר די אונאפהענג־יקייט פון ליטע. אין דער ליסטע וועלכע מיר האבן, געפינען מיר דעם נאמען פון א געפאלענעם אידישן פאלדאט פון אייער שטאט מיטן נאמען..... חענן דעם דאזיקן פאלדאט זיינען אונגעגעבן די אונטן קומענדע ידיעות. אזוי אבער וו עס זיינען דא אין דער ליסטע געוויסע אונדיטלקייטן בעטן מיר אייך ענטפערן אויב די אלע אונגאבן און דער נאמען שטימען. די רובריקעס, וועלכע זיינען נים אויסגעפילט צוליב מאנגל אין ידיעות, בעטן מיר אייך אויסצופילן אויר זאלט דטצו אינלאדן צו אייך די אונועהעריקע פון פארשטארבענעם.

פאלגענדע ידיעות זיינען אונגעגעבן:

נאמען.....

זון פון.....

אלט.....יאר.....

פון שטאט.....

געדינט אין פאלק.....

סנח, ארט און צייט פון טויט.....

וואו געקומען לקבורה.....

17/II 1922

לייטער פון דער אבטיילונג
פאר קהלות ענינס

Letter from the Ministry for Jewish Affairs, Kovno
Translated on next page

Letter from the Ministry for Jewish Affairs, Kovno *Keidan Yizkor Book p 176*

Division of Communal Matters
No : 193/64

Kovno 13 January 1922

Document No:43736

To The Congregational Committee in – Keidan

We are currently carrying out specific statistical investigation of the Jewish soldiers in our army, who fell in the fight for the independence of Lithuania.

In the list we have in our possession, we have discovered the name of a fallen Jewish soldier from your town, Eliezer Stoller.

However, as there are in this list certain anomalies, we ask you to let us know if all the details and the names are in agreement.

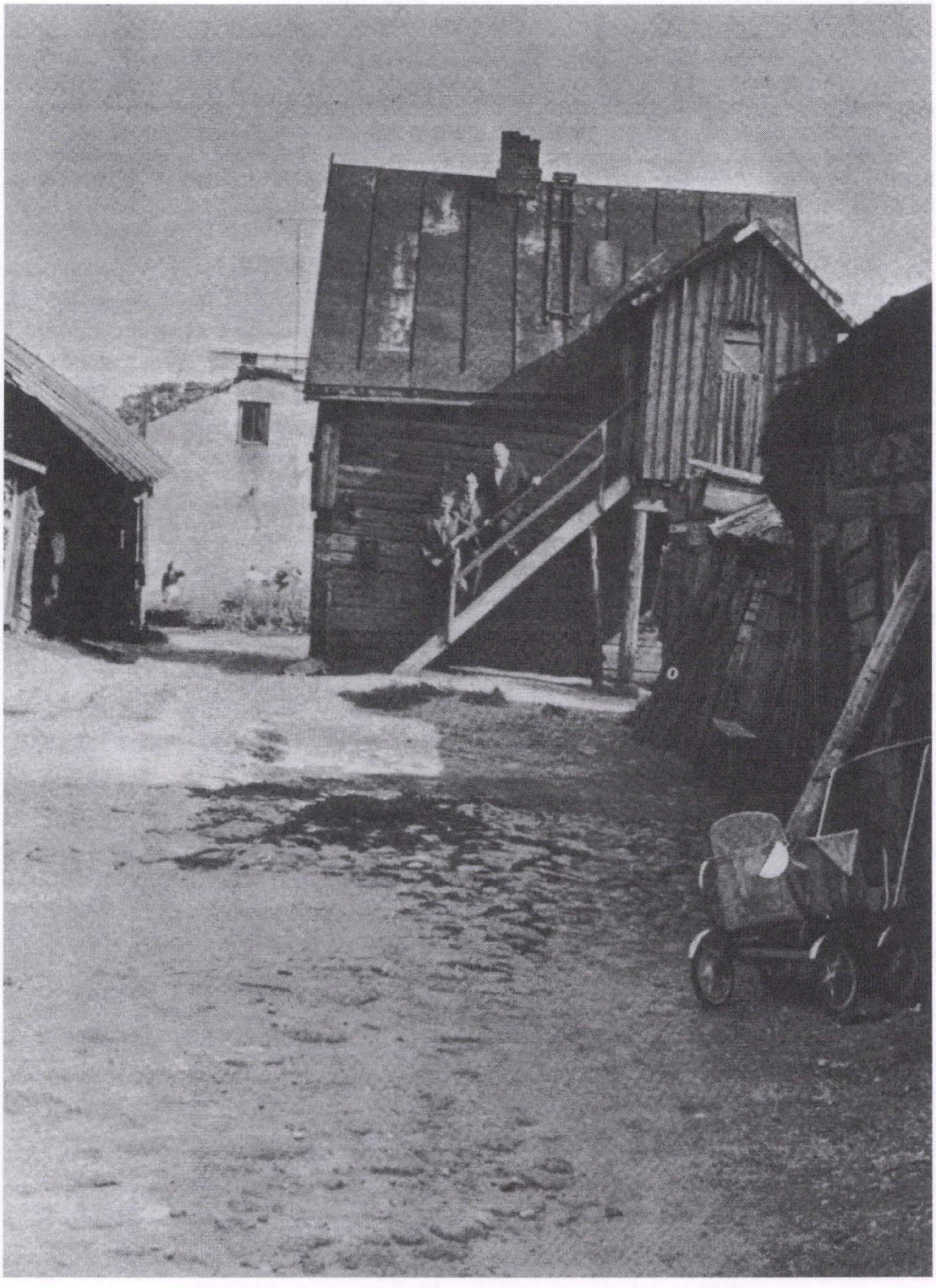
Please complete all the appropriate details pertaining to the deceased that have not been filled in, in the columns, due to lack of information.

NAME	Eliezer Stoller
SON OF	Israel
AGE	19 years
TOWN OF ORIGIN	Keidan
REGIMENT	9th Infantry Division
PLACE AND TIME OF DEATH	Slain 17 March 1920
PLACE OF INTERMENT	Name illegible
NOTE : HANDWRITTEN	He was later disinterred and transferred to Novo Aleksandrovsk (now Zarasai), where he was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Signed : S Shapiro – Head of Department of Jewish Affairs

Ch Klatzkin - General Secretary

(Handwritten across face of document : "We forward the completed reply")



Meishe Chone Shamesh's cheder, photo taken August 1969.

Little Portraits *Keidan Yizkor Book p 178*

Dr. Chaim Epstein

Originally published by the Keidaner Assn. of New York, 1930.
Translated by Meyer Dwass.

Only the Devil Could Stand it

Reb Noach Reubens often suffered from toothaches. In those days there were no dentists in Keidan, and even if there were Reb Noach could not himself have afforded such a luxury. So he relied on various folk remedies. Once he even allowed himself to be talked into a cure by the old German baker on German Street.

One time his wife Rashe brought a bottle of brandy home and poured a small glassful for Reb Noach, telling him to keep it on his aching tooth. This was supposed to be a proven remedy for toothache. A bit later, Noach begged her, "Rashe, let me have another glass! I swallowed the first one." "Wretched man!" shouted Rashe, "Keep it on your tooth!" "Only the devil can stand that!" answered Reb Noach.

* *

For Chana's Sake

Bunikov, Keidan's justice of the peace, once passed Chana Lipe's shack "across the water." It was a miracle the shack was still standing, propped up as it was on all sides with beams and boards. Its window panes were shattered and the roof was torn apart. Bunikov decided on a way to help poor Chana rehabilitate her home. He came up with the idea, that whenever people were brought before him on charges – say someone failed to keep the area in front of his house clean, or a couple of peasants were fighting in the marketplace – he would fine them an appropriate amount "for Chana's sake." Jews who paid fines did so willingly, even with pleasure, since they knew their money was going to help a poor Jewish widow.

But one Thursday, a market day, there appeared before Bunikov a bunch of drunk peasants who had been fighting among themselves. Bunikov realized that such a large group presented an opportunity to raise enough money to complete the renovation of Chana's house. He fined each of them two rubles. He was quite surprised a short while later when his clerk came in and said that none of the peasants had any money, but that they would be willing to sit in jail "for Chana's sake."

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Personalities and Images

אישים ודמויות

Rabbis of Keidan *Keidan Yizkor book pp 181-190*

Shmuel Hadari and Josef Chrust

Translated by Bella Golubchik

The Jewish settlement in Keidan is ancient, and the town's Jewish community is one of the oldest in Lithuania. The town held a respected place in the "Council of the Land of Lithuania," in which it was represented from the council's founding in the 15th century. This council served as a sort of parliament, dealing with all economic, social, legal and educational affairs of the Jews of Lithuania and acting as a decision-making executive body.

Ancient Lithuanian regulations placed all Jewish settlements on the right bank of the Neman River under the jurisdiction of the Keidan community for a variety of purposes.

The events of 1648 and 1649, which brought destruction and devastation to many communities, actually bypassed Keidan and its Jews. These, like many others in Lithuania, sent aid to victims of the pogroms.

Keidan was always an important town among the people of Israel. It served as a center of spiritual activity and an important place of Torah learning. Many rabbis and prodigies occupied its rabbinic chair, and their fame spread far and wide beyond Lithuania's borders. The town's first rabbis served also as leaders of the Keidan district, to which many Lithuanian communities belonged.

Reb Yosef bar Uri of Kobrin

We do not know the names of Keidan's first rabbis. The first scholar known to us among the Jews of Keidan was Yosef of Kobrin (Yossel Kobriner). In 1698 he composed *selichot* (atonement prayers) in memory of the persecutions of the Jews in various countries (the pogroms of 1648-1649). They were read in all the Lithuanian congregations at that time. He was a renowned scholar but did not have the official title of rabbi, nor serve in that position.

Reb Yehuda Zundel ben Reb Ozer

The first rabbi known to us is Rabbi Yehuda Zundel the son of Reb Ozer, who was the head of the rabbinical court in Keidan and environs. His "*haskama*" (a type of book endorsement) of 1670, introduces the books "*Be'er Avraham*" and "*Mei Be'er*" written by Rabbi Avraham Lisker, head of the rabbinical court in Raseiniai, which were published in Frankfurt an der Oder in 1683.

Rabbi Hillel bar Naftali Zvi (1615–1690)

He was the author of the book "*Beit Hillel*" about the "*Shulchan Aruch.*" He was born in Brisk to a family of famous scholars in 1615. He studied Torah with Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Darshan, and possibly also with Rabbi Yehoshua Heshil bar Yakov, who was known by the nickname Rebbe Reb Heshil, and who was his aunt's husband. He married the daughter of a prominent congregational leader in Vilna and relocated there.

In 1650 and 1651 he served as a judge in Vilna in the rabbinical court of Rabbi Moshe, who wrote the book "*Khelkat M'khokek.*" From there, he was appointed rabbi in a number of Lithuanian towns, the last being Keidan. In 1670 he became rabbi for the congregations of Altona and Hamburg, and in 1671 the neighboring community of Wandsbek also accepted him as their rabbi. There he remained for about 10 years. In 1680 he became rabbi in Zołkiew (aka Zhovkva, now in Ukraine), where he served until his death on 22 Tevet (January 3) 1690.

Rabbi Hillel was among the most important teachers of his generation. Rabbi Yaakov Amdan termed him "the most saintly rabbi teaching in the tradition of the House of Hillel." He also excelled in his position as a leader and was chosen to represent the rabbinic committees of Jarosław and Zołkiew. Many books carry his endorsement. He made a number of important religious rulings in his town and his name is recorded in the annals of the congregation.

He wrote a significant book on the four sections of the "*Shulchan Aruch*" and before his death, he instructed his son, Reb Moshe, to edit and publish it using funds from his inheritance. Reb Moshe fulfilled this, publishing his father's amendments to the "*Shulchan Aruch*", "*Yorei Deah*" and "*Even Ha'ezer*," under the name "*Beit Hillel*" in Dyhernfurth in 1691. His novel interpretations of the "*Shulchan Aruch*", "*Orach Chaim*" and "*Choshen Mishpat*" remained in manuscript. These, along with his commentaries on the Torah using the investigation and questioning method, and on the Kabbala, remained in manuscript with his heirs.

Rabbi Elyakim Getsel ben Rabbi Shlomo Halevi (d. 1702)

He was the son of Rabbi Shlomo Halevi, who was head of the rabbinical court of "*Khelkat Sadeh*" in Vilna in 1671.

Rabbi Elyakim Getsel became head of the rabbinical court for Keidan and surrounding areas after Rabbi Hillel, mentioned above. Prior to this he headed the rabbinical court in Brody (Galicia) during the time of the Gaon, Khacham Zvi. His signature is recorded on a regulation of 1699 in the journal of the Keidan Burial and Benevolence Society. He passed away in Keidan in 1702.

Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel ben Rabbi Elyakim Getsel Halevi (d.1720)

He was the son of Rabbi Elyakim, mentioned above, and served after him as head of the rabbinical court for Keidan and environs, and is recorded in the Journal of the Keidan "Burial and Benevolence Society." He passed away in Keidan in 1720.

Rabbi Pinchas ben Rabbi Eliezer (d. 1730)

Rabbi Pinchas bar Eliezer became rabbi of the town and environs after Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel, mentioned above. He was known as a great Kabbalist. During his lifetime, there lived in Keidan the Chassid Falk, who is mentioned in the book, "*Ben Uri.*" This was published in Zołkiew in 1729.

He wrote many books, among them "*Even Harosha,*" "*Even Hashoham,*" "*Even Pina,*" "*Even Shtiya*" and a commentary on the *Pirkei Avot.* He passed away in Keidan in 1730.

Rabbi Moshe bar Shimon Margalit (1710–1781)

The greatest of the commentators on the Jerusalem Talmud. He was born in Keidan about 1710, and served as head of the rabbinical court for Keidan and environs. It is believed that the Vilna Gaon studied Torah with Rabbi Moshe Margalit in his youth and when Rabbi Moshe came to Vilna, the Gaon showed him the respect with which a student honors his teacher. Some say the Gaon's diligence in the study of the Jerusalem Talmud was the result of this rabbi's influence.

Rabbi Moshe Margalit's greatest work is his commentary, "*Pnei Moshe,*" covering and illuminating the entire Jerusalem Talmud. Were it not for him, the Jerusalem Talmud would remain a closed book to us. He was very well versed in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, and in all great talmudic literature; together with this he possessed a very sharp intellect and a very refined understanding. To write his commentary he used manuscripts of *Tosefta* (supplements) to the *Mishna* and ancient books. He also made efforts to acquire worldly knowledge necessary to understanding of the Jerusalem Talmud.

He left his town and travelled among cities and countries to study Torah. The name of Rabbi Moshe Margalit appears among the students at the faculty of botany of the University of Frankfurt an der Oder. There can be no doubt that his interest in this subject stemmed from his desire to write commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud's major section, or order, called "*Zeraim*" (Seeds).

His travels through the cities of Europe took him to Amsterdam, where in 1755 he managed with the help of local philanthropists to publish his commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud's order "*Nashim*" (Women). This commentary had two parts: "*Pnei Moshe,*" similar to Rashi's commentary, and "*Mare Hapanim,*" a kind of addendum to the Jerusalem Talmud.

In his introduction he explains that he began with the order "*Nashim*" because the other two orders had already been interpreted by other commentators ("*Zeraim*" by Rabbi Eliyahu Polda, and "*Moed*" by Rabbi David Frankel). Fifteen years later he published the order "*Nezikin*" (Damages) of the Jerusalem Talmud (in Livorno, Italy). There he also attempted to publish the "*Zeraim*" commentary and had already managed to publish "*Berachot*" (Blessings) and the first page of the tractate "*Peah*" but he apparently lacked the financial means to finish the printing, and the two orders "*Zeraim*" and "*Moed*" were not published until a few years after his death.

In the preface to the tractate *"Shavuot" (7:6)* he declared: "I testify before heaven and earth that this commentary on the six orders of the Mishna, which I have expounded, follows the most intense investigation and study, deliberation, diligence and exhaustive searching, from morning til night, delving, investigating and searching in all sections of the Babylonian Talmud using the methods and commentaries of the sages of blessed memory, to the best of my ability. With God's help, I have managed to find commentaries and systematic explanations for the Babylonian Talmud and many manuscripts from the earliest sages of blessed memory, which were not to be found in our country. I also found an addendum in a very ancient parchment, over a thousand years old," and so on. He concludes his introduction to this tractate thus: "May God permit me to publish all these. I await and look forward to coming soon to the Holy Land if God will aid those who wish to be purified there." However, this did not happen; he managed neither to publish his book nor to make *aliya* to Eretz Israel, because he died during his wanderings, while searching for the means to complete the printing of his book, as he passed through the city of Brody on 12 Tevet (January 9) 1781.

He also mentions his books of innovative interpretations: "*Pnei Hamenora*" on the Torah and "*Be'er Mayim Chaim,*" on the Babylonian Talmud's tractates *Shabbat* and *Eruvin*, which were not published.

Rabbi Yechezkel bar Avraham Katzenellenbogen (1668–1749)

Born about 1668 in Brisk (currently Brest), he studied Torah with Rabbi Mordechai Ziskind, the rabbi of Brisk. He served as rabbi in a number of congregations, among them Keidan, Birzh (Biržai) and environs. The Katzenellenbogen dynasty in Keidan began with him. From there in 1714 he was appointed to the important rabbinic post in the communities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek, where he served for 30 years until his death.

He was one of the most important rabbis of his generation and many notable rabbis sent him religious queries, among them Rabbi Dovid Oppenheim of Prague. Many authors also approached him with requests that he endorse their books. His replies were printed in his book "*Knesset Yechezkel*" (Altona, 1733) and thus many of his opinions were circulated in books by the sages of his generation.

He also wrote commentaries on the Talmud in a volume titled "*Lechem Yechezkel,*" which was not published. In contrast, a book entitled "*Mayim Yechezkel*" (Paritzek, 1786) was published long after his death. This contained commentaries on the Torah, arranged by weekly reading. According to Steinschneider[104], he was also the author of the book "*Meorer Zikaron,*" which combined references to the Mishna with rulings by Rashi and *Tosafot*, and was published anonymously (Altona, 1727).

He died about age 80 on 23 Tamuz (July 9) 1749 in Altona. Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz, who took his place in the rabbinate of the Three Communities[105], eulogized him twice, and these eulogies were published in his book "*Ya'arat Dvash.*"[106]

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[104] Moritz Steinschneider, German bibliographer, who catalogued and translated Jewish writings from the Middle Ages through the 18th century.

[105] Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek.

[106] A mystical commentary on the Torah, central to Kabbala

Rabbi David bar Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen (d.1757)

Son of Rabbi Yechezkel, he served after him as rabbi in Keidan and environs. He dedicated himself totally to the education of the prodigy who afterward became known as Rabbi Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon, and who married the young Chana from Keidan, daughter of the wealthy Reb Yehuda. He is mentioned in the records of the Burial Society of Ragole (Ariogala), near Keidan, where he served as rabbi before moving to Keidan.

He served as rabbi of the town in the time of Shabbtai Zvi. Together with his son Avraham Katzenellenbogen, the rabbi of Brisk, he strongly supported the rule forbidding study of the "*Zohar*" before age 40. They were concerned that Kabbalistic study would spread throughout the towns of Lithuania. He passed away in 1757.

Rabbi Meshulam Zalman bar David Katzenellenbogen (d. 1771)

Son of Rabbi David, mentioned above, he followed him as rabbi in Keidan in 1758. Like his father, he too first served as rabbi in Ragole, near Keidan, and is mentioned in the records of its Burial and Benevolence Society. He is recorded there in a note from 1762.

His endorsements are to be found in many books, among them "*Beit Yakov*" and "*Tiferet Yisrael*" published in Frankfurt am Main. He passed away there in 1771.

Rabbi Menachem Nachum bar Meshulam Zalman Katzenellenbogen (d. 1790)

Son of Rabbi Meshulam Zalman, mentioned above, and the brother of Rabbi Mordechai Katzenellenbogen. He served as rabbi for Keidan and environs after his father, from 1770 to 1778. He is mentioned in the book "*Luchot Ha'edot*" among the scholars of Lublin. He passed away in Keidan in 1790.

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai bar Menachem Nachum Katzenellenbogen (d.1810)

Son of Rabbi Menachem Nachum, mentioned above, he was a disciple of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. He served as rabbi in Ragole and afterward in Keidan from 1782 to 1795. He then left for Germany and settled in Frankfurt am Main.

His works include: "*Alfa Beta,*" a key to the legends of the Talmud in alphabetical order (Frankfurt am Main, 1855-1866); "*V'hakna'ani az Ba'aretz* " – a commentary on this verse (Frankfurt am Main, 1857); "*She'elot U'tshuvot*" (Frankfurt am Main, 1857), regarding a ban on cutting hair during the intermediate days of a festival (Rotterdam,1857); "*Ma'ayanei Yeshua*" solace from the prophets with explanations (Frankfurt am Main, 1859), "*Hatorah V'hamitzvot,*" the 613 commandments of the Torah in alphabetical order (Hannover 1863, and in an expanded version, Stettin, 1865); "*Divrei Moshe,*" in which he admonishes the sons of Israel to bring their hearts closer to Torah (Hamburg 1851); and "*Mimshal Koach Melachim Retzon Adonai*" about monarchy (1854).

His endorsement is found in various books, for example "*Zera Yakov*" and "*Sha'ar HaRachamim.*" He passed away in Keidan in 1810.

Rabbi Tzemach bar Uri Zaks

Born in Keidan, his father was Reb Uri. He served as scribe and rabbinical judge in Keidan and environs in the time of Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Katzenellenbogen. His father was a friend of the Vilna Gaon in his youth, when he stayed in Keidan. He was a descendant of Reb Shneur, who served as finance minister of Hungary and died a martyr. After his death, his sons took the family name "Zaks"– an acronym for "*Zera Kedoshim Shneur*" (Descendants of the Martyr Shneur.)

He was very knowledgeable in Talmudic literature, Jewish history and also in the books of research and science. He also wrote Hebrew poetry.

Rabbi Yitzhak bar Katriel Troib

He lived and worked in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Katzenellenbogen. He wrote the book "*Gaon Olam*" about the Vilna Gaon, which was published in Altona in 1798, and "*Ykra Dashkevi*" published in Altona in 1799.

Rabbi Moshe bar Avraham

He lived in the days of Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Katzenellenbogen, and was known by the name "Reb Meishl Hindes". He was the brother of Rabbi Eliyahu, head of the rabbinical court in Tovrig (Tauragė), Rabbi Gershon, head of the rabbinical court in Shadova (Šeduva), and Rabbi Shmuel, rabbinical court head in Shat (Šeta). He was the son of Rabbi Avraham, who was the "Preacher of Meisharim" in Shklov, head of the rabbinical court in Krazh (Kražiai) and Ragole, and a brother of the Vilna Gaon.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hacohen

He served as rabbi of Keidan after Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Katzenellenbogen. He was a renowned kabbalist and a disciple of the kabbalist prodigy Rabbi Shlomo Landa, who was head of the rabbinical court in Vilkomir (Ukmerge), and a pupil of the Vilna Gaon.

Rabbi Moshe Rappoport (d. 1839)

A Talmudic scholar and philanthropist, he lived and was active in the days of Rabbi Aryeh Leib, mentioned above. Born in Keidan, and as his father was Uriya, he was known as Reb Aryeh Reb Uriya's." He wrote the books "*Imrei Moshe*" – a commentary on the Book of Esther (Warsaw, 1889) and "*Toldot Moshe*" – a commentary on the Pesach Haggadah (Warsaw, 1889). Both books were published with commentaries by Rabbi Shaul Shapiro, head of the rabbinic court in Ponevezh (Panevėžys).

He is mentioned in "questions and answers" in "*Nachalat Shimon*" in connection with the ritual bath built in Keidan in 1832. He passed away in Keidan in 1839.

Rabbi Avigdor

He lived during the time of Rabbi Aryeh Leib mentioned above, and was the grandson of Rabbi Uri Feibush, who was head of the rabbinical court in Vilna and who afterwards settled in Jerusalem, where he was called Rabbi Feibush the Ashkenazi. Rabbi Avigdor was the father of Rabbi Yitzhak, head of the rabbinical court in Pumpian (Pumpėnai).

Rabbi Reuven ben Rabbi Tzemach Zaks (d. 1852)

He was appointed rabbi in Keidan after Rabbi Aryeh Leib. He was the son of Rabbi Tzemach Zaks and the brother of Rabbi Matityahu Zaks from Keidan. Prior to that he was head of the rabbinical court in Volpa (Voupa, Belarus). His endorsement appears on the Talmud published in Slavuta in 1835. He passed away in Keidan in 1852.

Rabbi Yehuda Yudel ben Reb Pesach

He was a rabbinic judge in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Reuven Zaks. His father, Reb Pesach, was a teacher and rabbinic judge in Keidan. His endorsement appears, together with that of Rabbi Reuven Zaks, on the Talmud published in Slavuta.

Rabbi Yaakov

He lived and worked in Keidan during Rabbi Reuven's time. Known as "Yankel Keidaner", he wrote a major interpretation of the "*Tanya*" and published an anthology of legends called "*Sipurim Niflaim*" (Wondrous Stories).

Considered a kabbalist, he was a follower of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, who wrote the "*Tanya*,"[107] and of Rabbi Aharon Halevi Hurwitz of Staroselye and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, author of "*Tzemach Tzedek*".

Rabbi Tzemach bar Avraham Shapiro (1777–1838)

He lived and worked in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Reuven Zaks. He was the son of Rabbi Avraham Shapiro, head of the rabbinical court in Telz (Telšiai). Descended from the

[107] The *Tanya,* written by Shneur Zalman of Liady, is the main work of the Chabad movement's philosophy and approach to Hasidic mysticism. Hurwitz and Schneersohn were also major figures in the early Chabad movement.

gaon who wrote "*Megaleh Amukot,*" he was the father of Rabbi Yechezkel Shapiro, head of the rabbinical court in Vidukle. He was the brother of Rabbi Moshe Shapiro of Krazh (Kražiai), Rabbi Shimon Shapiro, head of the rabbinical court in Birzh (Biržai), and Rabbi Shmuel Shapiro, head of the rabbinical courts in Druya (currently Belarus), Ponevezh and Telz.

Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev Wolf (d.1865)

Grandson of Rabbi Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen, who wrote "*Knesset Yechezkel,*" he became rabbi in Keidan after the above-mentioned Rabbi Reuven. He was called "Ironhead" for his very incisive intellect. He passed away in Keidan in 1865.

Rabbi Hillel bar Avraham Hacohen Bishko (1816–1868)

Lived and worked in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev, mentioned above. He was a disciple of the Gaon Rabbi Yitzhak of Volozhin. Grandson of the preacher Rabbi Hillel, head of the rabbinical court in Ratzki. He wrote the book "*Hillel ben Shachar.*"

He was a diligent scholar of Torah and was among the greatest and sharpest minds in the town. Even the elite of Vilna called him to meetings about communal matters. He is mentioned in the responsa "*Nachlat Shimon*" by his teacher, Rabbi Shimon Zarkhi of Tovrig (Tauragé), published in Vilna in 1897, and in "*Amudei Esh*" by Rabbi Avraham Shmuel of Rasseyn (Raseiniai), published in 1875 in Vilna. He passed away in Keidan in 1868.

Reb Zvi Hirsh Halevi

He was the head of the yeshiva in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev Wolf. He was the father of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Moshe Halevi Sirkin.

Rabbi Rafael Yom Tov Lipman ben Rabbi Israel (1816 -1879)

Rose to head of the rabbinate in Keidan after Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev, mentioned above. Born in Ruzhanoy (Ruzhany, Grodno district), where his father was head of the rabbinical court. Studied at the yeshiva of Minsk and age 20 was appointed rabbi in Krevo, close to Volozhin. He was named head of the rabbinical court in Keidan in 1841. In 1847 he served as head of the rabbinical court in Ciechanowiec (now Belarus) near Bialystok. In 1849 he served as rabbi in Mezritch (Międzyrzec Podlaski). In 1859 he was invited to serve as rabbi of Bialystok, which had been without a rabbi for 9 years.

Members of the congregation of Mezritch wouldn't allow him to leave, so he was forced to flee the town in the middle of the night. He served as rabbi in Bialystok for 20 years. He protected ordinary people from abuses by the authorities. Accused of encouraging resistance to the Russian authorities, he was imprisoned and sent to Grodno for an investigation that dragged on for months. When he was released and returned to Bialystok, his congregation organised an elaborate reception for him.

His works include "*Oneg Yom Tov, Questions and Answers*" (Vilna, 1880, second printing Bilgoray, 1931); and "*Oneg Yom Tov – Discourses*" (Petersburg, 1906). He passed away in Bialystok in 1879.

Rabbi Avraham Shimon bar Yitzhak Isaac Troib (1814-1875)

Born in Keidan, he ascended to head of the rabbinate in 1852, after Rabbi Rafael Yom Tov Lipman Halperin, mentioned above. The Troib dynasty in Keidan begins with him. He was one of the great Torah scholars of his generation. He wrote many books, among them "*Be'er Avraham"* (New York, 1947) "*Halachot Gdolot*" (Warsaw, 1875). He was also a great expert in financial matters.

His first occupation involved agriculture. He owned a large farm, but saw no profit from his labor and was pressed to accept the post of rabbi in Keidan. He was among the progressive rabbis, and published articles in the press. He disputed with Y.L Gordon about reforms in religious practice. He passed away in Keidan in 1875.

Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev Troib (1789-1869)

Father-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Shimon, above, he served as head of the rabbinical court in Shavli (Šiauliai) for 12 years, then gave up the rabbinate and relocated to Keidan to live with his son-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Shimon. They acquired a large farm which they managed and supervised together, both wearing talit and tfillin.

His endorsement appears in the Slavuta Talmud, published in 1835. He passed away in Keidan in 1869, at age 80.

Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev bar Issachar (d. 1891)

He lived in Keidan in the time of Rabbi Avraham Shimon Troib. He was a rabbinic judge and a teacher of Jewish law in Keidan for about 30 years. After that he became a judge in the Ashkenazi rabbinical court in Jerusalem. He passed away there in 1891.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Simcha bar Avraham Shimon Troib (1829-1911)

Son of the above-mentioned Rabbi Avraham Shimon, he he served as head of the rabbinical court in Krok (Krakės), and was appointed rabbi in Keidan after his father. His endorsement appears in the book "*Be'er Yakov*" published in Vilna in 1880.

He was the father-in-law of Rabbi Yitzhak Eliyahu Gefen, head of the rabbinical court in Jadów (Poland) and father-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Eliyahu Kaplan, known as the "prodigy from Rakov," (Belarus) and the father of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Troib from Boisk, Courland (now Basuka, Latvia). He also excelled in general science, mathematics and foreign languages.

He distinguished himself in ethics and virtuous behaviour. He loathed gifts. When forced to accept a gift to respect the dignity of the giver, he kept the money to compensate any poor Jew whose chicken he declared unkosher. He passed away in Keidan in 1911.

Rabbi Meir Dober bar Moshe Elazar Pager (d. 1906)

The son of Rabbi Moshe Elazar Pager from Vilna, he served as assistant rabbi in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Simcha Troib. He first headed the rabbinical court in Rumshishok (Rumšiškės) and then served as rabbi in Keidan. He later immigrated to the United States and passed away there in 1906. He wrote the books "*Yad Meir,*" "*Likutei Yaakov*" and "*Piskei Halachot*".

Rabbi Shmuel Meir bar Yaakov Yosef Shor (1848–1898)

He worked in Keidan during the time of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Simcha Troib. He was the brother of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Shor, head of the rabbinical court in Kretinga (Lithuania).

Rabbi Avraham bar Eliyahu Baruch Kamai hy'd[108] (1860–1941)

Born in Shkud (Skuodas), he was the son of the famous gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch Kamai, head of the rabbinical court and of the Mir yeshiva. He was the senior *gaon* of his time.

He became head of the rabbinical court after Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Troib, mentioned above, and served as community rabbi in Keidan until 1915. Afterward he moved to Mir and served in his father's place, both in the Mir rabbinate and also as deputy head of the yeshiva. His teaching was aimed mainly at students already well versed in the Mishna and legal literature, who were interested in innovative discussions. Rabbi Avraham Tzvi Kamai was also renowned for his practical solutions in matters of Jewish law. The students of the adult school that was established next to the Mir yeshiva, "warmed themselves by his light" and benefitted from his wisdom and advice in all matters of prohibitions and permission, religion and law.

He was notably ethical, pure and innocent in his behavior. He possessed many handwritten manuscripts of Talmudic literature, his own and his father's.

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[108] May God avenge his blood.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, as the Mir yeshiva relocated to Vilna and then to Keidan, Rabbi Avraham Tzvi Kamai, the rabbi and leader of the Mir community, refused to leave his position and shared the fate of his congregation. At the time of the Russian occupation, he watched as the large, splendid yeshiva building was secularized and turned into a cinema. When the town was seized by the Nazis, he was martyred together with 900 fellow Jews in the massacre on 8 MarCheshvan (Oct 29,) 1941.

Letters from there described that slaughter in shattering detail and told of his final speech to the Jews of Mir before their agonizing death.

Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber hy"d (1871–1941)

Born in the small town of Jałówka, Grodno province, his father was Rabbi Aaron Yosef Halevi. He served as rabbi in Tovrig (Tauragė) and Vekshne (Viekšniai). During the First World War he was exiled to Russia and served as rabbi in Minsk city for five or six years. He established a yeshiva there and was its principal until he left Minsk. After the war he returned to Lithuania and continued to serve as rabbi in Vekshne. In 1924 he was offered the post of rabbinical court head in Keidan, which had been vacant for many years due to a lack of suitable applicants to continue the dynasty of *gaonim* (geniuses) that had previously held this position.

In Keidan he developed extensive public activities which elevated him to a position of leadership among the orthodox Jews, and made him one of the great rabbis of Lithuania. He served as chairman of the Rabbinic Association of Lithuania. After the abolition of Jewish autonomy, the Rabbinic Association committee was recognized by the Lithuanian authorities as the Jewish community's representative, and he negotiated with the government on all matters pertaining to Lithuanian Jewry.

In Keidan he established "*Beit Hatalmud,*" which served as a type of preparatory school for the yeshiva. With the outbreak of the Second World War, many yeshiva students arrived in Keidan from Poland, particularly from Mir; he then set up a significant yeshiva that continued to exist until the annihilation of the Jews of Keidan by the Nazis. He motivated his congregants with his energy and spiritual devotion until the very last moment, when he was led to the slaughter together with his entire congregation. He led the procession, with a Torah scroll in his arms and prayer on his lips, encouraging them to die as martyrs, fearlessly.

His son–in–law, Rabbi Aharon Galin, who served as a rabbinical judge in the town and helped Rabbi Feinsilber in his old age, turned to the Lithuanians standing by and said to them in their own language: "Spilled blood will not be silenced!" But the sound of the shots silenced him.

Rabbi Feinsilber, one of the most famous geniuses in the rabbinic world, wrote many books and left behind many manuscripts. Renowned among his published works was "*Nishmat Chaim*" dealing with circumcision, published in Jerusalem in 1908, with an endorsement by the most senior *gaon* of that generation, Rabbi Shmuel Salant, and with additional comments and opposing ideas by Rabbi Pesach Hirsh Frank; "*Hashlamat Hamidot,*" dealing with behavior and ethics, published in Keidan in 1925; "*Yeriot Shlomo,*" commentaries on "*Sefer Ha'avoda*" and "*Sefer Hakorbanot*" by Maimonides, which was published in Keidan in 1933.

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The Vilna *Gaon* *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 191-197*

From the Hebrew Encylopedia, vol 3, p. 545. Translated by Bella Golubchik

Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, the Vilna *Gaon (*Genius*)*, also called the *Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu* or *HaGra* for short, was born on the first day of Passover, 1720 in Seltz (Selets), Grodno province, and died the third day of *Khol Hamoed* Sukkot ,1797, in Vilna. He is regarded as one of the greatest Jewish intellectuals of the 18th century.

His family was renowned for its great rabbis, community leaders and eminent Torah scholars, among whom was Rabbi Moshe Rivkes, author of *"The Well of the Diaspora" ("Be'er Hagola"*) and other works.

Eliyahu displayed exceptional abilities from his childhood. When he was six and a half years old he gave a sermon in the synagogue in Vilna and, during an examination in front of the city's rabbi, displayed profound understanding when questioned on its contents. At age seven he was brought by Avraham Katzenellenbogen, the rabbi of Brisk, to the home of Rabbi Moshe Margalit, the rabbi of Keidan (and author of "*Pnei Moshe*," a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud). The boy studied with him for three months. He studied Torah on his own for most of his life, thus he was not influenced by the Talmudist methods of learning used at that time.

Apart from written and oral Torah traditions, he also studied Kabbala, and before he reached the age of 13 he even tried his hand at practical Kabbala. He wanted to create a *golem* (an automaton made of clay) but "while making it a vision appeared before me and I stopped, because I said: I have probably been prevented by heaven" (from the introduction to *Sifra Ditzniuta* by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, with commentaries by the Vilna *Gaon*)

Eliyahu also studied astronomy, geometry, algebra and geography. At first his interest stemmed from his need to understand certain religious laws that could not be comprehended without the aid of geometry and other sciences. He took an interest in astronomy particularly to facilitate his understanding of the Hebrew calendar. The story is told that in his childhood, he showed some renowned scholars a shortcut to calculating phases of the moon, by placing a series of spheres in a specific order. He also dedicated much effort to Hebrew grammar. He saw great need to study Torah according to grammatical rules in order to understand the Talmud. Despite this, he was not averse to using the kabbalistic study method known as "inquiry, hints and secrets."

Eliyahu was extremely diligent in Torah study, and even after his marriage to a girl from Keidan when he was almost 18, he used to hide in a little house on the outskirts of the town and study industriously day and night. He lived in Keidan for some time, boarding with his father-in-law. Afterwards he went into "exile" in the cities of Poland and Germany and visited important congregations, such as Zolkiew, Lissa (Leszno) and Berlin. Even where he tried to remain out of the limelight, his stature in Torah and piety was recognized and he was praised everywhere.

Eliyahu settled in Vilna after his return from "exile" and he lived there until his last days. He made his livelihood from a bequest from Rabbi Moshe Rivkes, who left a fund to aid scholars from his family. He was also supported by a fixed amount from the community, which also supplied him with an apartment. Around 1785, this stipend was raised to 28 gold coins a week. This was more than the salaries of the head of the rabbinical court, the adjudicator or the *shtadlan* (representative to the gentile government), but less than that of the community's chief scribe at that time. There were many outstanding scholars in Vilna at that time, and the help given to *HaGra* showed how highly he was esteemed, considering that he held no official community position.

He used to shut the windows of his room during the day and study by candlelight in order to learn without interruption. In winter he would study in an unheated room and soak his feet in

cold water so he would not fall asleep (according to Rabbi Israel of Shklov in the introduction to his book "*Pe'at HaShulchan*"). According to Eliyahu's sons he never slept more than two hours in every 24, and these only in half-hourly periods. He wrote very brief comments and explanations in the margins of the pages he was studying. He concentrated on studying the Jerusalem Talmud in particular and "opened the heavens and uncovered the hidden meanings of obscure chapters in it" (according to his son Avraham in his funeral oration "*Searat Eliyahu*").

In his fortieth year, he began expounding Torah to a group of outstanding scholars. In 1768 his rich relative, Reb Eliyahu Peseles, bought a plot next to *HaGra's* apartment and erected a building for study and prayer. This "minyan of the pious" was expanded afterwards into a house of study (*beit hamidrash)* and worship known as *HaGra's kloyz*.

A few of his students, such as Rabbi Chaim from Volozhin and the brothers Rabbis Menachem Mendel and Simcha Bunem from Shklov, used to record his commentaries in a book, and because of them and his sons, his teachings became well known. However, at that time, he began to distance himself from unfamiliar people. An exception to this was the *Maggid* (preacher) of Dubno, Yaakov ben Ze'ev Kranz, whose friendship he sought and to whom he once wrote, "do not be tardy in coming to visit me, my friend, so that you may lift my spirits and we may enjoy being together."

In this period, the *Gaon* also first began to opine on public issues. In 1755 he was asked by Rabbi Yonatan Eybeshutz to comment on a disagreement with Rabbi Yaakov Emden, to which *HaGra* replied: "Who am I from a far off land, young and humble, that they should heed my opinion?" But his spiritual influence continued to grow and, according to witnesses, "no important action could be taken without his opinion" (cf: Israel Klausner: "Vilna in the time of the *Gaon*, p. 237"). At this time he also began to actively participate in the struggle against hasidism.

When the first groups of *hasidim* began to organize themselves in Belorussia and Lithuania, the leaders of the Shklov congregation turned to the Vilna *Gaon* asking how to deal with the new sect. He replied that they should fight it. The congregation in Vilna also decided to close down the hasidic minyan, to burn their writings and to excommunicate them. In 1772 the Vilna congregation sent letters to other communities urging them to fight the new movement. Thus Vilna, led by *HaGra*, became the centre of opposition to hasidism, and their actions greatly slowed the spread of that movement, especially in Lithuania.

The leaders of the hasidic movement in Belorussia, rabbis Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Shneur Zalman of Lyady, tried to meet with the *Gaon* in 1772 and 1777, to prove to him that the new movement did not threaten traditional Judaism, but he refused to meet with them. The *Gaon* renewed his struggle against hasidism after the publication of the book "*Toldot Yaakov Yosef*" by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye in 1781. Through his influence hasidism was banned again, and envoys were sent to rouse communities against the movement.

Around 1794 the *Gaon* ordered the public burning in Vilna of the book "*Testament of the Baal Shem Tov" ("Tzavaat HaRib'sh")*. In 1796, *hasidim* spread a rumour that the *Gaon* regretted his persecution of hasidism. The *Gaon* reacted with a letter to the congregations of Lithuania and Belorussia, sent by special envoys: "I stand by my previous position. It is incumbent on any godfearing son of Israel to repel and pursue them in all possible ways and subdue them in any place where the hand of Israel reaches, because their sin is deeply embedded in them and is as painful to Israel as a skin disease." When some of the Minsk *hasidim* raised doubts about the authenticity of the *Gaon's* signature on this letter, the leaders of that community sent two envoys to Vilna to clarify the matter. Eliyahu reacted to this with an even sharper letter against hasidism.

Because *hasidim* had denigrated the *Gaon's* honor, the Minsk congregation declared that every aspersion against the *Gaon* would elicit excommunication.

A quarrel broke out in Vilna between the leaders of the congregation and the head of the rabbinical court, Rabbi Shmuel. Eliyahu supported the opponents of Rabbi Shmuel, even though the latter was related to him. The *Gaon's* interference was caused by the rabbis' verdict that Rabbi Shmuel had breached an oath. *HaGra* had also learned of cases in which Rabbi Shmuel had behaved inappropriately. As a result of Eliyahu's interference, Rabbi Shmuel's supporters turned to the government law courts, demanding that the congregation's weekly payments to *HaGra* be stopped, since he held no formal communal position. Community leaders protested and even imprisoned the tutor Yoel for spreading assertions in the spirit of Eliyahu's opponents. At the same time, the son of one communal leader fled to a monastery and converted to Christianity. When he was kidnapped from the monastery in an effort to return him to the sons of Israel, the state and the church courts imprisoned some of the suspects in the abduction. Eliyahu was also investigated and even spent a month in prison (February 1788). He was imprisoned a second time in September 1789 for twelve weeks, but the term was commuted.

The *Gaon* had decided before 1783 to emigrate to Eretz Israel. He travelled alone, intending to bring his family afterwards. On his way he wrote a letter, a sort of spiritual testament. The letter reflects his tender feelings for his children, his wife and his mother. He asks his wife not to stint on tuition for their sons, to take care of their health and nutrition. He also gives instructions for the education of his daughters. He warns that they should not curse, take oaths, lie and quarrel. He considered sinful talk among the greatest of sins and even advises his sons to visit the synagogue less, praying alone at home to avoid idle chatter and envy. He also warns his sons not to covet riches and honor, because "it is common knowledge that the whole world is vanity." (from the book "*Alim LeTrufah," 1836.*)

For unknown reasons *HaGra* never reached Eretz Israel and returned to Vilna. He passed away while trying to get out of bed to perform the rites of Sukkot.

The importance of the Vilna *Gaon's* spiritual activities stemmed mainly from the tremendous range of subjects that interested him. There is no subject pertaining to Judaism about which he didn't leave a book, or commentaries and thoughts, which often were expanded to books. The *Tanach*, the Talmud and even some smaller tractates of the Jerusalem Talmud, the commentaries of the rabbis, the *Zohar* and its later additions, the *Shulchan Aruch* (code of Jewish law), Hebrew grammar and a long list of general sciences including geometry, surveying, astronomy, medicine and more. All these occupied the Vilna *Gaon*. Every subject that had even a peripheral bearing on Judaism interested him. He found new meanings even in the orders of prayers and liturgical poems that surprise even the present generation. (For example, in the hymn for the end of Shabbat, instead of: "Our seed and money he will multiply as the sand," he read "Our seed and peace.") And even as he immersed himself in all the branches of the Torah, he concerned himself with the nation's wellbeing. Whether justified or not in his struggle against hasidism, the fact that he fought it in his extreme old age was a sign of his greatness and spiritual alertness. The tremendous admiration he received from the Jewish people, especially in Lithuania, stems from all this. That is why the very term "the *Gaon*" can only mean the Vilna *Gaon*.

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The basis of his world view was the idea that the Torah was eternal, in all its details and grammar. A slight injury to any paragraph of the law, any objection to any of its commandments, he viewed as damage to the foundation of the whole Torah.

He expressed his view on the eternality of the Torah in the most impressive explanation in his book *"Sifra DiTzniuta,"* chapter 5. Everything that has existed, exists or will exist is encapsulated in the Torah. Not only the laws, but even the details of all living species, every human being, every animal, plant and inanimate thing, everything is included in the Torah. From "In the beginning..." to "...in the sight of all Israel"[109].

[109] The first and the last words of the Five Books of Moses.

His belief in the eternal value of the Torah, in all its details, included also all the material contained in the Oral Law. From this stemmed his strict adherence to every letter of the laws that spell out observance of the Torah's commandments. This view led *HaGra* to re-establish certain ancient customs and prohibitions which are no longer even mentioned in the Talmud, but only in some sources referred to in the Talmud.

HaGra was interested in "external wisdom" as an aid to understanding Torah. In his opinion, "All the sciences are necessary to understand our sacred Torah and are included in it because, as much as a person lacks in knowledge and other skills, he lacks 100 times more in the wisdom of Torah." (from an introduction written by Rabbi Baruch of Shklov on *HaGra's* behalf to *"Euclid,"* published in The Hague, 1740). That is why he influenced the doctor, Rabbi Baruch to translate these "external wisdoms" into Hebrew, as much as possible. He even wanted to see the books of Yosef ben Matityahu[110] translated into Hebrew, "because through them, we will be able to understand the intentions of our great rabbis, of blessed memory, in the Talmud and the *Midrash*, where they discuss our Holy Land in those ancient times." According to a notice that reached us, from 1778, he saw in the lack of interest in secular sciences which was common among certain groups of Jewish scholars, a sort of defilement of the name of Israel among the nations "who will come against us with the roar of the many waters, asking: where is your wisdom? And the name of heaven will be desecrated." (Introduction to *"Euclid"* by Rabbi Baruch of Shklov).

After deepening his studies in several scientific fields, he wrote on mathematics (*"Ayl Meshulash"*, Vilna-Grodno, 1834); geography (*"Tzurat Haaretz VeTavnit HaBayit,"* Shklov 1802), astronomy and the calculation of the seasons and constellations (in manuscript form only).

He also valued music very much and used to say "It is impossible to know most of the Torah nuances and the secrets of the songs of the Levites and the secrets of the *Tikunei Zohar* without it." (Rabbi Israel of Shklov in his introduction to the book *Pe'at HaShulchan*). He also was very interested in medical science.

However, he actually knew no foreign languages, and all his knowledge in science derived from Hebrew sources, which had been compiled mainly during the Middle Ages. That is why he knew nothing of Newton or Lavoisier, and all his scientific thought was based on the theory of the four elements.

He was nevertheless distanced from the *Haskalah* (enlightenment) movement which in his time was spreading through German Jewry. He imposed a severe punishment on the *maggid* Abba of Glusk, who became close to the movement's followers when he was in Berlin and later, in his discussion with *HaGra,* mentioned that "Rashi did not succeed in simply explaining the Torah and that it was not certain that the rabbis of the *Midrash* interpreted it correctly" (*"Aliyot Eliyahu"*, note 34).

HaGra didn't wage war on the *Haskalah* movement, because at that time, its adherents remained within the bounds of traditional Judaism. They didn't see a contradiction between the attitude of *HaGra* to "external wisdom" and the activities of Moses Mendelssohn, and among them were some who were in contact with both (Mendelssohn and the *Gaon*) at the same time.

HaGra's main strength lay in the subject of Jewish religious laws. The fact that certain rules and articles in the Talmud are in abbreviated or incomplete form in one source, and complete in another, prompted *HaGra* to correctly formulate many of them by comparing sources. There were some amendments that were not based on research in the sources, but only on

[110]Better known as Josephus, Jewish historian during the Roman wars that led to the destruction of the Jewish state. Considered a traitor to the Jews of that period, his books were banned for centuries. But archeological evidence in the 20th century has confirmed many of his observations.

some "reasonable" opinion, and he saw in this "total sin – for which one should be excommunicated." (*"Shulchan Aruch"*, *Yore De'ah*, 279:2). He was often able to solve difficult problems in the *Mishna* by correctly redefining the problem. In his striving to solve *halachic* problems he distanced himself from *"pilpul"* (lengthy, intense debate over religious issues), about which he said: "Because, in them it is possible to increase crime and magnify transgression and pleasant discussion will be lost, and truth expelled from God's congregation" (His son Avraham's introduction to the *"Shulchan Aruch", Orach Chaim*). He thus demanded of every scholar "that he should do his investigation honestly, abhor the most intricate questions, and admit to the truth even when expressed by small schoolchildren, and no desires deviating from the way of reason should go against the truth." (Introduction by *HaGra* to *"Shulchan Aruch," Orach Chaim*).

He saw Rashi's commentary as the most suited to the study of Talmud because his interpretations are "the most suitable for someone who comprehends" (Ibid). In the spirit of his method he also established rules for studying Talmud. In his opinion, the sages of Talmud used to expound the *Mishna* as they did the Torah, through simple explanation and investigative discourse. Explanations of the *Mishna* should be based on the assumption "not that something is lacking there, but that we lack the depth of understanding of the *Mishna* sages" and they should be undertaken using the method of *Drash*. In truth, the *Mishna* lacks nothing. It happened that a rabbi would sometimes quote a *Mishna* sage, but since *Gemara* sages held different opinions, he interpreted *Mishna* so as to make it agree with their opinion, thus creating an impression that it was deficient.

HaGra's view of the relation between the *Mishna* and the *Gemara* was expressed with total consistency in his commentaries to the *Mishna*. Sometimes he tends away from the conclusions in the *Gemara* related to certain tractates of *Mishna*, interpreting them according to the *Mishna's* approach. (See his commentaries to the tractate *Brachot.*)

HaGra included the *Zohar* and *Tikunei Zohar* and other ancient books of *kabbalah* in the system of *Torat Israel* (Jewish Law), like *Sefer HaBahir* and others, in which his expertise was great. Here too, he dedicated great attention to determining the proper formulation. He especially tried to clarify the sources of the *kabbalah,* so that there would be no discrepancies between them and the Talmudic sources. If he did happen to find such contradictions, he attributed them to an error in understanding the sources of the *kabbalah*, or an error in the Talmud. This same care that he showed in defining the terminology in the sources of the *kabbalah* he displayed also in relation to the writings of *Ar"i*[111], which he studied in depth "and brought them out of the darkness of errors introduced while copying them" (Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in his introduction to *Sifra DiTzniuta*). His system of clarifying kabbalistic literature was also directed to understanding matters as they were, but his students used to say that in every "simple" explanation, he exposed hidden secrets of the original. Because of his devotion to the *kabbalah*, he referred negatively to philosophy, which he called "the cursed".

The words of Maimonides ("*Rambam*") especially aroused *HaGra's* criticism, because the former denied names, incantations and amulets, thus denying the feasibility of practical *kabbalah*, to which *HaGra* was attracted from his childhood days. (See his commentaries to the *Shulchan Aruch, Yore De'ah,179:13.*) In his criticism of philosophy he was not shy about harshly attacking Rabbi Moshe Isserles (HaRama). When *HaGra* quotes *HaRama* on the concept of *pardes* which was according to Rambam "the wisdom," he noted that "neither he, nor *Rambam* have seen *pardes."* (Ibid, 246:18).

Despite his great erudition in *kabbalah*, *HaGra* opposed the notion that learning *kabbalah* was preferable to learning *halacha*, to changes in the prayers and to new customs, seeing in these signs of *Sabbateanism*[112]. He saw disrespect for the value of Torah in accentuating the love of God and worshipping out of joy, which hasidism holds higher than studying Torah.

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[111] Rabbi Itzhak ben Shlomo Luria, a leading *kabbalah* mystic of the 16th century

[112] The doctrine professed by followers of Shabbetai Tzvi, a self-proclaimed messiah of the 17th century

His program of studies was suited to the demands of the *Mishna*. (*Pirkei Avot*, 5:21) He demanded certain knowledge of the *Tanach*, though not necessarily of the sources, also from girls, and he stressed that they should know the book of Proverbs to be able to behave according to its laws.

None of his works were published during his life. All were left in manuscript: His commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* (Shklov, 1803; Grodno, 1806; Vilna, 1819; Koenigsberg, 1856-1858), *Ayl Meshulash,* segments of the Torah commentaries and commentaries to some *aggadot* (legends) (Vilna, 1800). Some notes from teachings of *HaGra* which he wrote hurriedly in the margins of books, have survived. They were copied afterwards – sometimes with errors that distorted his intentions – by his sons or students. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin said of these notes (In his introduction to the *Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim*) that they are "like the stars, that appear small, while all the world stands under them." Some novel interpretations of the Torah known to circles of scholars in or near Vilna, were delivered in his name. For this reason, to be sure that what was being passed down in *HaGra*'s name was actually written by him, the rabbinic court in Vilna declared on 19 Kislev (December 8, 1797), that it was forbidden to publish anything in his name which hadn't been absolutely verified as his handwriting (*Shnot Eliyahu,*commentaries to *Mishna*, order *Zraim*, Lvov, 1799). Due to the deficient external appearance of *HaGra's* spiritual heritage, his major effort at strict formulations was not used in full.

HaGra wrote commentaries on almost all the books of the*Tanach* and on some books of the *Mishna*. Out of his clarifications on the books of *Mishna,* his commentaries to *Mishnat Aruga* (tractate *Klayim*, 3:1, Shklov, 1803) gained a special popularity among his students. It is necessary to have a knowledge of geometry to understand this explanation, and the commentators of the *Mishna* had difficulty in expounding it before. Rabbi Israel ben Shmuel of Shklov, a student of *HaGra*, while living in Eretz Israel, took a special interest in the innovations of *HaGra* to the tractate *Zraim* for their value in agricultural work in Eretz Israel. He testified: "He laboured long on the issue of *aruga* [a flowerbed], during which he would be able to finish half of the Babylonian Talmud, he rejected all the interpretations of the "first scholars"[113] and came up with a new truthful method" (In his introduction to *Pe'at HaShulchan*, Tzfat, 1831).

HaGra also wrote commentaries and explanations on *midrashim*[114] of the *Tannaim*[115] from *Mekhilta* (his commentaries to it were published in Vilna, 1844), *Safra* and *Sifri* (commentaries published in Vilna, 1866) to different parts of the *Tosefta* (the addendum to the Jerusalem Talmud), to the Jerusalem Talmud, to the whole Babylonian Talmud and to the Talmudic legends.

His commentaries on the sources of the *kabbalah* include a commentary on *Sefer Hayetzira,* (Grodno, 1806), *Sifra DiTzniuta* (Vilna, 1820), the *Zohar* and *Tikunei Zohar, Reiya Meheimana* and *Sefer HaBahir*. His book on Hebrew grammar was published under the name *Dikduk Eliyahu* (Vilna, 1833, with a commentary by Aryeh Leib Gordon "Rules in the Hebrew Language", Ibid, 1874).

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who eventually converted to Islam.

[113] Great rabbinical scholars and teachers active between the 11th and 15th centuries.

[114] Early commentaries on the written and oral Torah.

[115] Sages of the period between 10 and 220 CE.

Avraham Shlomo Zalman Tzoref *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 198-9*

From "Encyclopedia of the Builders and Pioneers of the Yishuv." Translated by Miriam Erez.

Born in Keidan, Lithuania on 1 Kislev, November 3, 1785 — or as he himself wrote later, in the year "TaKuM"[116], thereby hinting at his life's purpose — the son of Reb Yaakov. He learned Torah diligently, as the best Jews in Lithuania did at the time. He married, engaged in trade, and continued to study Torah.

On 8 Iyar, May 2, 1811, a convoy of emigrants, disciples of the Vilna Gaon, left Lithuania for the Land of Israel, among them Avraham, his wife Chasya, his young sons Mordechai, Moshe, and Yitzhak; and two brothers-in-law, Reb Tzvi Hirsh and Reb Yosef the Preacher. They made the journey on horse-drawn carts and sailing ships, and on Hoshana Raba, October 10, 1811, they reached the port of Akko. Following the end of the [Succot] holiday, made their way to Tzfat.

During his long journey, Avraham learned silver- and goldsmithing (and thus began to use the name Tzoref[117],) and when he arrived in Tzfat, he bought a house, began engaging in his craft, and learned Arabic quickly. He befriended his customers and acquaintances, Jews and Arabs alike, made a good living, made sure to study Torah regularly, and joined in the leadership of the community.

When an epidemic spread across the Galilee in 1811, many of the Jews of Tzfat fled to the villages. About 10 Ashkenazi families left for Jerusalem, among them Avraham and his family. They snuck into the city in the middle of the night, dressed like Sephardic Jews. After the epidemic subsided, while a few returned to Tzfat, Avraham remained in Jerusalem, opened a shop, and engaged in his craft. Here also, he was liked by the rich Arabs.

At first, the Ashkenazim in Jerusalem were unable to establish their own synagogue, as they did not want their presence in the city discovered. They prayed in the small hut allotted to them by the Sephardim in the yard of their synagogue. When they lacked a tenth person to form a *minyan*, they added a boy holding a Torah scroll who had not yet reached bar mitzvah age. Over the next few years, more Ashkenazim arrived from Tzfat, particularly following the Druse and peasants' revolt and the earthquake that brought havoc to the Jews of Tzfat. From then on the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem grew and flourished.

With no small effort, the first Ashkenazim were able to rent the "right of use" of the courtyard, which until then had housed the yeshiva of Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar, author of the biblical commentary "*Or Chaim*" ["light of life"]. They established a house of worship there, but during prayer they had to station young men as guards to warn them whenever Muslims approached the building, so worshippers could quickly take away the Torah scroll and disappear from sight. The life of real *anusìm*[118]!

The Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem also faced obstacles from the leaders of the Sephardim, who feared that donations from European Ashkenazim would now be diverted to local Ashkenazim. With substantial effort, the dispute was resolved using the laws of Torah, together with Ashkenazic representatives, Avraham among them.After they agreed on a way to divide money from Europe, this family quarrel ceased to prevent *aliya* by European Jews to Jerusalem.

Avraham was held in high esteem by the leaders of the Sephardim, and in 1815 he was sent as an emissary to Europe on behalf of both communities, after he influenced both sides to make peace and be judged by neutral parties (rabbis from abroad) for the benefit of them all. Under the terms of that day, the rabbis' representative would pay a flat sum to his "senders,"

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[116] The Hebrew year of his birth was תקמ"ו [5546]. He switched the letters around to form תקו"מ, spelling the Hebrew word *takum*, meaning "shall go up", thereby hinting at *aliya* to the Land of Israel.

[117] Hebrew for "goldsmith"

[118] Jews forcibly converted to Christianity during the Inquisition, who continued to practice Judaism in secret.

and any income he raised would belong to him.

From 1818 to 1822, Avraham was again sent as emissary on behalf of both Ashkenazim and Sephardim to the Netherlands and England; and again in 1828 he went to Europe on behalf of the *kollels* [yeshivas for full-time, married scholars]. He also undertook a special mission, the redemption of the ruined "Hurva" synagogue of Rabbi Yehuda HaChasìd — which the Arabs were holding against "the known debt" — so that they could rebuild the synagogue and other public buildings for the Ashkenazi community.

In Germany, Tzoref received Prussian citizenship, and thereafter was close to the Prussian consul in Alexandria, and was appointed the latter's proxy in Jerusalem and granted the authority to issue Prussian protection documents to Jews. A few years later he was also named to represent the Jews to the council of the governor.

When Muhammad Ali, governor of Egypt, took over Eretz Israel and Syria from the Ottoman Sultan, his stepson, Ibrahim Pasha, was made commissioner of Jerusalem. Pasha was afraid to eat a Muslim dish in the city for fear of being poisoned, so the Jews brought him his meals: One day his dish would be prepared by one of the prominent Sephardim, the next day [a meal was brought] from Avraham's house, and so on. Avraham's son Mordechai would bring Pasha his meal on a special copper tray, which served as a sort of entry permit. One day Avraham himself went to bring Pasha his meal, in order to ask him to rescue the Jews of Hebron, whom the revolting Arabs were plotting to destroy, and Pasha sent an army to restrain the insurgents.

During the same period, Avraham asked Ibrahim Pasha to issue a royal decree forgiving the Ashkenazim the debts of the students of Rabbi Yehuda HaChasìd, and returning to them this ruin known as Dir Shaknaz. Toward that end, Tzoref also went to Egypt and with the help of the Austrian and Prussian consuls, obtained the desired decree from Muhammad Ali. In a legal hearing before the mufti and the kadi, the right of the Jews to the ruin was recognized, and the Arabs who had built shops on its grounds were forced give them back to the Jews in return for compensation. Following this, Avraham led the Jews of Jerusalem in quickly cleaning and purifying the site, removing the garbage that had accumulated there for generations, and established there the Beit Midrash [house of study] *Menachem Zion*.

The Arabs who were forced to abandon the "Hurva" bore animosity toward Tzoref on account of his victory. As he sat in his house one night studying Torah, a young Arab tried to shoot him. The bullet missed its target, and as he ran away the shooter fell into a well of sesame oil and drowned. A year later, another Arab attempted to kill Avraham as he was on his way to sunrise prayers, sneaking up behind him and hitting him on the head with a sword. For some months Avraham was bedridden and lost his memory. Only on his last day on earth did his memory return, whereupon he asked all his family and friends to gather so he could bid them farewell.

Tzoref died in Jerusalem on 19 Elul, September 16, 1851, and was buried on the slopes of the Mount of Olives next to the tomb of the prophet Zachariah. The heads of the Sephardic community sought to delay his burial (there was still no Ashkenazic cemetery at the time) until his heirs paid off the debt that they said he owed them. Only owing to the resolute intervention of Rabbi Shmuel Salant did the Ottoman Chief Rabbi Hahambashi concede, and order the burial to proceed.

Tzoref's wife, Chasya, died on 4 of Heshvan, October 24, 1865, and was buried beside her husband.

His son Mordechai was one of the agricultural and industrial pioneers in Eretz Israel (and Mordechai's son, Rabbi Yoel Moshe Solomon, was one of the founders of Petach Tikva as well as various Jerusalem neighborhoods beyond the Old City walls.) Avraham's son Moshe died in Baghdad on his way back from an emissary mission in eastern Asia. His son YItzhak became the supervisor of construction at the Hurva Great Synagogue, and his daughter Miriam was the wife of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Trachtenberg.

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Moshe Leib Lilienblum *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 200-202*
Originally published in the "Hebrew Encyclopedia," Vol. 21, p. 797

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Moshe Leib Lilienblum: born Keidan 1843, died Odessa 1910. He was an author and publicist, one of the founders of Hibbat Tzion (Lovers of Zion)[119] and in his youth had a yeshiva education. At thirteen he was betrothed to a young girl and moved to the house of his father-in-law in Vilkomir (today Ukmergė). There he became proficient in rabbinic literature, and after his marriage established a yeshiva for young boys.

Lilienblum became greatly interested in the ideas of the moderate *haskalah* (enlightenment) movement while delving into the research literature of the Middle Ages. In 1867 he published a major article, "*Orhot Talmud*" ("The Ways of the Talmud"), in which he described the Talmud as the foundation of Jewish existence and morality; however, he took issue with the talmudic system for adapting the Torah's laws to modern life and called on rabbis to rescind outdated customs, particularly those based on Kabbalah. On the other hand, he urged *maskilim* (followers of the enlightenment) not to abandon their faith, which he said was the only guarantee of Jewish existence.

In 1869 Lilienblum published an addendum to "Orhot" in which he emphasized these ideas more sharply. He denied the authority of the *"Shulchan Aruch"* (the Code of Jewish Law) and called on rabbis to create an updated *"Shulchan Aruch,"* to spread the love of crafts and labour throughout the nation, and to establish modern schools. This provoked a furious dispute: He was declared an outcast, his livelihood was harmed and he was nearly handed over to the authorities for conscription into the army. As a result he left for Odessa, intending to acquire a European education and a profession with which to support himself. (1869).

In Odessa Lilienblum suffered bitter disappointment when he saw how many Jews had stopped observing religious laws and distanced themselves from the culture of Israel and its national aspirations. He composed a satire in verse called "*Kahal Refaim*" ("A Crowd of Ghosts"), in which he highlighted the defects of 15 characters in communal life. *Maskilim* were also criticized there for devoting themselves to rhetoric and research rather than to urgent problems of the nation. He also criticized young people for leading dissolute lives, and using their education in superficial ways. Despite its minor literary worth, the work was well received.

In Odessa Lilienblum met Abraham Krochmal, and through him encountered biblical criticism and accepted its conclusions. At that time he perfected his Russian and began reading radical literature, which made a tremendous impression on him. He saw that the revival of the Jewish people would come from changes in their economic and cultural lives, while the question of religion seemed to him less significant. He expressed his views in the article *"Yiddishe Lebensfragen"* ("Problems in Jewish Life") in the Jewish newspaper *Kol Mevasser*, of which he had become editor in 1871. When the anger of the orthodox forced him to resign this position, he published a series of articles in the newspapers *HaMelitz* and *HaShachar*, in which he explained that the Haskalah aimed to improve lives, that the Hebrew language and Torah of Israel were bound to be forgotten, and that the task of the Hebrew writer was "to give our people a realistic worldview, and cause the imaginary life that they cling to to disappear."

Despite all this, Lilienblum never found spiritual peace. In 1873 he wrote a significant autobiography, "*Hatat Neurim*" ("Sins of Youth", 1876) which was both frank and detailed. It

[119] A forerunner of the Zionist movement, *Hibbat Tzion* arose in response to the Russian pogroms of 1881, and initiated early agricultural settlements such as Rishon LeTzion, Rosh Pina and Zichron Ya'akov.

mainly described a struggle in the soul of a young Jew who had been emancipated from his religious heritage, but who after abandoning it was overcome by despair and a recognition that he had become "miserable in the land." Despite a lack of artistic or literary claims, the book's influence on young people was profound, as many were at that same stage or treading the same path. The orthodox saw the book as dangerous.

Lilienblum struggled with great poverty in his private life, together with his family. He tutored and worked as a proofreader and clerk. He tried to acquire a secondary-school certificate so he could learn a profession. At the end of the 1870s he connected with the first group of Jewish-Hebrew socialists, and wrote *Mishnat Elisha Ben Abuyah* ("A Teaching of Elisha Ben Abuya") for them. This article, the best in form and style of all his works, was written as a parody of the Mishna and its commentators.

The pogroms of 1881 drastically changed Lilienblum's outlook, leading him to conclude that the Jews' problems stemmed from their position as strangers among the nations. He therefore proposed buying the land of Eretz Israel from the Ottoman sultan, to establish there a "state under the supervision of the rulers of Europe." After a time he concluded that the best course would be to acquire land and resettle gradually in Eretz Israel, even under Turkish rule. He wrote the essay, "On the Rebirth of Israel in the Land of Their Fathers," in Russian (1884), and later translated it to Hebrew. In this booklet, really a founding document of the Zionist idea, he posited that antisemitism was not a passing phenomenon, even in those places where Jews had achieved equality, and that the only solution was a return to Zion.

Lilienblum strongly opposed Y.L. Gordon, who saw reform of Jewish religious life in the Diaspora as a precondition to national redemption in Eretz Israel. Lilienblum claimed that national existence was paramount, and that rabbis and *maskilim* should unite for the sake of a common national enterprise. He also warned secularists to beware lest they cause a split in the nation, and argued that religious reform would happen of itself when the nation was established. Lilienblum became a committed Zionist; he helped organize the *Hibbat Tzion* movement in Russia and encouraged Pinsker[120] to be its leader. His most significant Hebrew article of that time was an incisive critique of the poems of Y.L. Gordon (1884), saying that Gordon had criticized the faults of the Jewish people without acknowledging that their cause lay in the lack of a state. Lilienblum argued that Gordon could not be called a "national poet" unless he "dedicated his pen" to the vision of a return to Zion. This criticism signaled a break by the new generation with the views of their elders, of whom Gordon was one of the leaders.

At the end of 1884 Lilienblum was elected secretary of *Mazkeret Moshe,* which acted as the managing group of *Hibbat Tzion* until the government allowed the establishment of "The Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Eretz Israel" (1890). Lilienblum served in this position as a liaison between the movement's orthodox and secular wings, without renouncing his views. He generally expressed the leadership's official line, and despite his opposition to the system of support, he called on the dependent settlements to accept administration by the Baron.[121] He discouraged the poor from making *aliya*, advising them instead to immigrate to America.

Lilienblum believed that realizing the Zionist idea required steady, even if slow immigration and settlement, accompanied by gradual adjustment to existing conditions. In 1899 he wrote two books, "*Derech Teshuvah*" ("The Path of Return") and "*Derech La'avor Golim*" ("The Path Out of Exile") which completed his autobiography. In his final twenty years he remained a strong supporter of "practical Zionism". He waged a prolonged struggle against Ahad Ha'am, contending that there was no alternative to promoting the still-weak agricultural

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[120] Yehuda Leib (Leon) Pinsker, a Russian-Jewish physician and early Zionist.

[121] Facing difficult conditions, the early settlers turned to Baron Edmund de Rothschild of France, who provided support for industrialization and economic development. Yet his administration was met with some resistance. While Lilienblum criticized aspects of this system, he realized that the settlements could not survive without this support and called on the settlers to accept Rothschild's authority.

settlement in Eretz Israel. Later he struggled also with those supporting spiritual Zionism and insisted on using the movement's meagre material resources to support the settlements, rather than cultural and educational institutions.

While he warmly greeted the arrival of Herzl and political Zionism, he still insisted that the work of *Hibbat Tzion* should continue alongside political efforts. He himself did not join the new movement, for fear of arousing the Russian government's suspicion of the "Support Society", but he always supported Herzl. Lilienblum viewed the Uganda plan[122] as a failure of the new Zionism, and in a series of articles, he called for this idea to be rejected in favor of even a modest settlement in Eretz Israel.

In 1909, Lilienblum began preparing his literary works for publication. He collected the main ones, softened some passages and divided them into four volumes. Volume one (1910) was published during his lifetime; the rest appeared after his death (1911-1912), edited by Dr Y. Klausner. The *moshav* Kfar Malal (Moshe Leib Lilienblum) was named for him.

The spiritual strength that drove Lilienblum throughout his life stemmed from his strong connection to his people. Concern for existence of the nation was always in his thoughts. His great influence grew from his honesty and courage. He helped many young people to leave the yeshiva, but he also led many of them back to the fold through *Hibbat Tzion.*

In his meticulous work as secretary of *Hibbat Tzion*, Lilienblum helped hold the weak organization together. He made peace between its different factions until the establishment of the *Histadrut* Hatzionit, (Zionist Organization). His work to promote for an armistice between the *maskilim* and the orthodox, to unify them in the task of settling Eretz Israel had a decisive value in the history of the Zionist movement, helping it to acquire a character of a real national political movement. Lilienblum was among those who introduced the idea of labor into the Zionist movement and was thus among the fathers of the labor movement within the *Histadrut Hatzionit.*

In the history of Hebrew literature, Lilienblum's writings serve as a link between the essays of Smolenskin, wrapped in heavy, rhetorical mist, and the polished, deep articles of Ahad Ha'am. His language is to the point, simple and natural, without rhetoric or decoration, aiming to explain the goal ahead. Because of this, he greatly influenced the literary style of Hebrew writers in his time.

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[122] At the Sixth Zionist Congress at Basel in August, 1903, Herzl proposed that Russian Jews be resettled in British Uganda as a temporary refuge. The plan was formally rejected at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

Reb Zvi the Cooper *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 203-208*
Dr. Aharon Leib Pick (Šiauliai)

First published by the Keidaner Assn. of NY, 1930. Translated by Nathaniel Stampfer.

The area around the Lithuanian city of Keidan has been famous for its beauty since earliest times. Nature has endowed it in full measure with pleasant features, especially in its water and greenery – a full pallet of beauty in each landscape. But the Almighty set a dividing line between the lovely trees and meadows and the Jewish neighborhood which, since early days, was as filled with scholars as a pomegranate with seeds, in order to ensure that these Torah scholars – "the renowned aristocrats of Keidan" – not be distracted from their studies, Heaven forbid, at peril of their lives.

The most ancient part of this neighborhood, which had never been particularly beautiful, lay on the banks of the Smilga creek, at the point where it flowed into the Neviazhe river. This small stream, whose waters were clear at their source, turned murky as they flowed past the Jewish neighborhood, divided the sacred from the ordinary; between the fields, meadows, trees and shrubs on the one hand, and the main synagogues and the other public buildings that were concentrated at this point on the other.

But these buildings, which to the local people appeared tall and awesome, were as nothing compared to the neighboring structures. Not only did the former not reflect any grandeur on the surrounding houses, they emphasized all the more the latter's pathetic poverty. They were for the most part wooden, one-story and black with age, or, contrarily, whitewashed to hide their age and ugliness as much as possible. With the exception of the synagogue street and its courtyard, and the street by the public bath-house, the neighborhood comprised only, narrow, smelly alleyways.

In this forlorn corner of the town, at the end of an unnamed alley that spilled into the street of the synagogue, there stood, until the "last fire" (about a year before World War I), a wooden house which even in this dilapidated neighborhood was distinguished from its neighbors by its poor and degraded appearance.

Its walls, low to begin with, now bent and blackened with age, stood miraculously on weak supports. Its roof was overgrown with weeds and moss which drooped over small, dirty windows like the brim of a hat over the eyes of a blind beggar. To complete the picture, this house was stuck into the sediment that collected at the end of the alley, where the cobbled surface stopped abruptly.

During the rainy season and when the snows melted, this end of the alley – with this poor house on one side and a squash patch on the other – regularly became a lake of mud, which could be safely traversed only with the help of Heaven and then only with high and intact boots.

The great fire, which occurred in this neighborhood about a year before the war, put an end to this house. Were it as significant to the outside world as it was to us Keidaners, it would surely have received special treatment and a special historical marker; and the unnamed alley could, by the merit of the house, also have deserved a famous name. For in this poor little house, which I have described plainly, without exaggeration, was born one of the heroes of our people and its literature: Moshe Leib Lilienblum.

The writer of these lines recalls the house and its surroundings as they remained engraved in his memory from childhood, that is, about half a century after Lilienblum's birth. Yet the town elders, including my parents, who were the closest neighbors to this house, assured me that although they remembered only dimly the early days of this particular house, no substantial changes, other than the occasional filling of cracks to prop up of the structure, were made from the time of Lilienblum's birth to then.

As is well known, this typical diaspora environment, in which Moshe Leib Lilienblum was born and educated, strongly affected his entire being, and throughout his lifetime he could not free himself from its influence. In vain did he remove himself to distant parts. In vain did he occasionally attempt to turn his attention to general, non-national ideals. His environment did not leave him. The sounds that emerged from the large Beit Hamidrash (study house), from the Great Synagogue and from the smaller prayer houses such as the *Shiva Kruim*, the gravediggers' *kloyz*, *Ein Yakov* and *Chayei Adam* near his parents' home – these sounds that filled the neighborhood rang forever in Moshe Leib Lilienblum's ears. He remained a Jewish scholar dwelling in the midst of his people, whose lifelong desire was to extricate his fellows from the darkness of their exile to a life of enlightenment and freedom in the land of their forefathers.

Between Lilienblum's father's house and my parents' "old" house (whose elegance did not exceed its neighbor's by much), there was a small garden, adjacent to the south wall of the *Chayei Adam* prayer house. The latter looked out proudly upon these two lowly neighbors, and a narrow footpath, wide enough for only two abreast. Thus, as noted above, we were among the closest neighbors to this house.

Reb Zvi the Cooper, or, as he was known in Keidan, "Reb Hirshe Bender" remains engraved in my childhood memory as a poor, thin old man, short and somewhat stooped, whose hair and beard grew untamed, a mixture of yellow and gray. Reb Zvi had a weakness for snuff, and the habit was visible on his moustache and nostrils. This, together with the absence of teeth, had a grave effect on the clarity of his speech so that his diction was unclear. If we add to this his shabby clothes, there emerges a portrait of a simple Jewish craftsman, a poor elderly Jew, an everyday man, as one might say. In fact, as everyone knew, he was truly poverty-stricken by any measure, forced constantly to struggle for a crust of bread. In his old age, he practiced his craft very little, and only rarely, particularly during the summer months, did he fit new hoops onto a barrel or neighbor's pail that had disintigrated due to heat and dryness. He worked in his long *tzitzit* fringes, a yarmulke on his head. His livelihood was meager, even with the constant support of his son. He received small sums from the Ein Yakov *kloyz* for acting as rabbi – reading Talmudic legends to other simple craftsmen between the afternoon and evening prayers – and from selling cabbage, turnips and other greens from his two gardens. In his struggles to make a living, his wife and her sister, an *agunah* [a woman abandoned by her husband without divorce] were a constant help.

Lilienblum's mother died when he was nine years old. Her sister then married Reb Zvi in order to raise her motherless nephew. In his book *"Hatat Neurim"* [Sins of Youth], Lilienblum called his stepmother a fool, saying she sacrificed her own life for his sake, not recognizing that after 20 years his father would be old and weak, and she would become miserable in the prime of life. We, the students at the Ein Yakov *kloyz*, after seeing her, called her "Aphrodite" with some sarcasm (her name, in the Keidan pronunciation, was Fride-Itte). In actuality, she never justified her stepson's prophesy, because she never got sick and apparently never felt miserable because of her husband's old age.. Rather, she was a plain, pious Jewish woman for whom poverty was a natural condition, a god-fearing woman without airs who did not dare to question the ways of the Almighty.

She did possess a special ability that yielded her a meager income. She was an expert, experienced mourner, reading from the *Ma'aneh Lashon* [a text for mourners] the prayers required by her clients at graveside during the month of Elul. [Translator's Note: Elul, the month that preceeds the High Holidays, is one of the periods during which religious Jews visit relatives' graves.] Similarly, she would recite the Sabbath and festival prayers aloud in the "women's section" for those who were unable to read. This was an accepted custom from early times in Keidan, so much so that for many years in the women's section of the Great Synagogue, there even was a man who engaged in this dignified occupation, especially during the High Holidays. He, however, used to station himself inside a large barrel in the women's section before the prayer service, and from there read the prayers in a loud voice.

(He apparently did this not because he was a disciple of Diogenes, but because of religious scruples.)

Fride-Itte's *agunah* sister, who was no less skilled as a mourner and reader, often assisted her. But her primary occupation was teaching Hebrew to Jewish girls. This woman, whose husband had abandoned her to sorrow with a young child, was constantly enveloped in a quiet melancholy. She loved to sing songs of tragedy and sadness in a soft undertone. In my youth, when I and one of my friends, Mr. B. Cassel, were collecting folksongs for Marek and Ginzburg, one of us succeeded in obtaining from her, with some difficulty, one of those melancholy songs. We speculate that she would sing it as a special incantation for an *agunah*. This song was published as Song Number 119 in "Jewish Folksongs in Russia." Its content, interesting from the folkloristic viewpoint (freely translated) begins thus:

Seven women sit and sit
By the well and the spring,
by the well and the spring.
Said one to the other:
Were my husband to appear,
Were my husband to appear!
I would transform myself into a mouse
And run about the square.
Oh how happy would I be,
Oh how happy would I be!
Etc.

Reb Zvi's small family labored and bore their difficulties in silence. Some special force drew me to this family as by some mystic charm. Reb Zvi himself, who was filled with erudition and a remarkable expert on rabbinic legends and wonder tales, believed with genuine childlike faith in all the miracles he read or heard about. For this reason he seemed not of this world, but as one whose soul hovers in the upper realms.

And despite his lack of clarity in speech or pleasing enunciation, in his old age he did possess a certain forceful speaking ability. When he read for the small, loyal audience in the Ein Yakov *kloyz* from the books of legends, he would convey to his listeners the state of his soul, suffused with wonder and simple faith, and to draw them along to a world filled with miracles and wonders. How much more so did he captivate a young boy like me, who eagerly absorbed his wonderful tales from the Talmud or historical sources.

I used to visit him often at his house. When the deep mud prevented me from visiting him in the fall and at winter's end, I would find him afternoons at the *kloyz*, a few steps from our house. Besides stories of sages, Reb Zvi used to relate tales from history, especially about the famous men of Lithuania, which he drew from various sources, written and oral. There is no doubt that these stories had great folkloristic and historical value, and it is regrettable that they have, for the most part, been lost forever. They were recorded neither by his son, M.L. Lilienblum (whose turbulent soul strived to separate itself from the old order and was at that time far from such things), nor by anyone else.

Years passed, the young grew old and I no longer needed the tales of my dear neighbor, Reb Zvi, as I concentrated on reading books, starting with Yiddish translations of the early biblical prophets, *"Kav Hayashar"* and *"Menorat Hamaor"* then graduating to Hebrew literature. Reb Zvi gave me several of his books, some of which I still remember well: "*Sefer Hayashar*", "The Journeys of Eldad the Dane" and "*Tzemach David*." It is possible that this last one was the book cited by M.L. Lilienblum in his "Sins of Youth" as among the first books he read, and which ultimately made his father realize that his son craved literature.

I, in turn, gave Reb Zvi books that I found among my father's volumes and which remain engraved in my memory. One was *"Shevet Yehuda"* [The Tribe of Yehuda] which took great

effort to read, due to blurry print on poor quality paper. Its chapters were printed alternately in block type and Rashi typefaces. There was also a book called *"Sha'ar Shamayim"* [Gateway to Heaven], a book about nature by Isaac Abravanel, the father of Leo Hebreaus[123], that described a sphinx bird and beings with navels connected to the ground, among other fantastic animals.

I also gave him the book *"Emunat Chachamim"* [The Faith of the Wise] by Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea[124], whose foreword admonishes doubters who deny the existence of demons, quoting the Talmud to say that "just because you have not seen it does not mean is does not exist." And a book called "From English Sailors," which recounted the recent discovery of a sea creature whose upper half is a woman and whose lower half is a fish, called "siren," whose existence had previously been doubted. And a small book called "Malkiel" which provided a proven method for seeing demons and spirits eye-to-eye. We both enjoyed reading these books very much.

The times change and we with them. I became a yeshiva student and moved to a series of Torah centers. But the new winds that began blowing through the Jewish world with the spread of Zionism penetrated the yeshiva world as well, so that I returned home an educated youth, dedicated heart and soul to divine enlightenment. Also, I became an enthusiastic member of *Khovevei Zion* [Lovers of Zion, an early Zionist group], a subscriber to *"Ha-melitz"* [a Hebrew newspaper] in partnership with three or four companions. I grew to recognize Lilienblum's great value as a writer and fighter for the Land of the Forefathers.

I was not surprised that with time, changes occurred in Reb Zvi as well. His son, M.L. Lilienblum, whom he had once symbolically mourned as an apostate, and whose name he never mentioned in my presence when I was young, had become for him a comfort and source of pride. It is noteworthy that from the day of Lilienblum's books "*Derech Tshuva*" ["Path of Repentance"] and "*Derech L'avor Golim*" ["The Exiles' Path"] a relationship of harmony and love developed between father and son; and he used to send his father all his writings devoted to the "Love of Zion" idea. In this way I, too, received from Reb Zvi Lilienblum's anthology "The Awakening," his play "Zerubavel" and his pamphlet in Russian, "The Settlement in the Land of Our Fathers."

This shows that Lilienblum's description of his father in "Sins of Youth" – from which one could conclude that Reb Zvi was a zealot ready to sacrifice his only son on the altar of fanaticism and a naïve believer in foolish fantasies – was exaggerated and tendentious. Lilienblum's harsh polemic against the old way of life in Lithuania's provincial towns, his battle against superstition as an educated religious reformer, Lilienblum's dissatisfaction with his backward education, of which he considered himself a victim, and especially the perversity of ordaining his future through an arranged marriage in Vilkomir – all this prevented Lilienblum from presenting a correct description of his father.

Lilienblum's contempt for his past can be seen in his contempt for his father's family name, Snepper (and not Sfener, as cited by Klausner and others) and that he chose instead to be called Herlichtson (Ben-Zvi), the name with which he signed his article "*Orhot HaTalmud*" ["The Paths of the Talmud"] in "Ha-Melitz". It is known that the Keidan town council members opposed this heretic's request; and only when the scholars of Kovno, with Dr. Sappir in the lead, intervened, they agreed to give him another beautiful surname, "Lilienblum" and not the name signed as a pseudonym. All this was possible before 1873, before the completion of

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[123] Also known as Yehuda ben Yitzhak Abravanel, 15th century Portuguese Jewish physician, poet and philosopher.

[124] 18th century rabbi and kabbalist in Mantua, Italy.

the official census list. This story of his name change is reported erroneously in most of Lilienblum's biographies.

Like the Talmud sages Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa or Rabbi Nahum Ish Gamzu, Reb Zvi was a man of exceptionally gentle character and noble traits, simple and childlike in his beliefs, a Torah scholar who nonetheless was attracted to secular knowledge. It is unfair to blame him for being a person of his times, unable to transcend his context. For that, his son's talent was needed; indeed, his son inherited good qualities from his father that helped him in his achievements.

In any case, Reb Hirsche could not be other than he was, given the conditions of his life and environment. He could not be more practical or foresee the future more than could other fathers in small-town Lithuania. Even now, 80 years later, they still continue to give their children an education that is past its time.

Still, as mentioned above, Lilienblum himself completely changed his opinion of his father; in addition to providing constant support, he visited him in Keidan a number of times and showed him great affection – I once witnessed this myself. In this way his father was exonerated, as he deserved to be by both his son and by Hebrew readers. So it was that Reb Zvi at the end of his life enjoyed great parental pleasure and fame from his famous son who, in the past, had caused him anguish, grief, and worry without end.

Some years ago, the citizens of Keidan told me that because of his son, Reb Zvi once received high honor and material benefit from a local aristocrat, such that the whole town was astir about it. The kernel of this story is doubtless true, although Keidan imagination must have added a measure of its own.

This is what happened: Surrounding Keidan were large, rich estates that once belonged to Polish noblemen. After the uprising of 1863 these were confiscated by the Imperial treasury and later sold, apparently for small sums, to various Russian generals. The large estate "Kaidany" about a mile from the town of Keidan, had belonged to the Czapski family. This estate, along with many others, "pleasantly passed"[125] to Count Totleben, hero of Sevastopol and Plevna. The general's large family spent summers at the Keidan estate and often remained during winter as well. (In one part of the estate, assigned to him by the Lithuanian government, the Count's only son, who once served Tsar Nicholas II, lives in strained conditions to this day.)

Count Totleben himself used to visit his family at the estate during the summer and eventually considered himself a Keidan resident. On his visits to the town, he would stroll in friendly fashion with many of the residents and frequent the stores of a number of Jews. Moreover, Jewish workmen were often employed at his estate. The Jews of Keidan regarded him as one of the "righteous gentiles" They tell that in the 1880s, when the pogroms started, he announced that no such disturbances would be allowed in the Kovno district, and, indeed, he assigned units of Cossacks to the most dangerous locations to maintain public order.

When Count Totleben was appointed Governor General of Novorossiya and was based in Odessa, Lilienblum came to his attention over some public matter. When Totleben became aware that Lilienblum was his townsman, and that his father still lived in Keidan, he was very pleased and decided to meet with Reb Zvi when he returned to his estate.

And so it was that one day, Reb Zvi was invited by Reb Gershon Hitner, who worked at the County's estate, and coincidentally was a gabbai of the Ein Yakov kloyz, to an audience with the Count. Reb Zvi washed and vigorously scrubbed the signs of tobacco from his nose and moustache, borrowed a top hat from one of the town's worthies and presented himself to the

[125] Psalm 16:6

Count. The nobleman, originally from Riga, spoke to the Jews in a simple German "almost like Yiddish." He received Reb Zvi warmly and spoke at length and in depth with him about his son and about himself. Afterwards, the Count sent him a generous gift "of heaven's dew and earth's oils"[126]– chicken, eggs, potatoes and the like.

Thus Reb Zvi derived great honor because of his famous son. Reb Zvi attained a ripe old age, dying of a brain hemorrhage due to arteriosclerosis.

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[126] Genesis 27:28

Torah Scholars Born in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 209-212*

From "Yahadut Lita" Vol. 3, Tel Aviv, 1967.
Translated by Bella Golubchik.

Dat, Rabbi Zalman-Aharon bar Dov (1859-1916)

Born in Keidan, he studied in Ragole (Ariogala) and Eishyshok (Eišiškės). He was the rabbi in Pushelat (Pušalotas) for 16 years and thereafter in Smilg (Smilgiai) where he assisted his father–in–law, Rabbi Moshe-Yona. He did not want to earn his living through his Torah scholarship, so he opened a pharmacy in Smilg, in which his sons worked while he studied Torah. He dedicated his income over many years to the building of a synagogue and ritual bath in the town. He was very philanthropic and kind to all. He was an educated person and a member of *Hibbat Tzion* (Lovers of Zion).

He published articles in "*Hamelitz*" and other newspapers. His book "*Toldot Aharon*" includes new interpretations of religious law and talmudic legends. He died in Pushelat during the First World War.

Heller, Yechiel bar Aharon (1814-1863)

Born in Keidan, he served as rabbi in Vilkavishik (Vilkaviškis), Suvalk (Suvalki) and Plunge. His works include "*Pillars of Light*" ("*Amudei Or*")– responsa and interpretations (Koenigsberg, 1856); "*Elegy for David*" (*Kina l'David*)about Rabbi David Luria (Koenigsberg, 1856); "*Light for the Righteous*" *("Or Yesharim")* an interpretation of the Passover *Haggadah* (Koenigsberg, 1857); "*Enveloped in Light*" *("Ote Or")* on the Song of Songs, with interpretations (Memel, 1861); "*Two Chapters" ("Shnei Prakim")* about the duties of Jews to the state, in Russian and German (1852). He also published articles about religious law in Rabbi Israel Salanter's "*Tvunah."* He died in Plunge.

Yoffe, Rabbi Yehuda-Leib bar Avraham-Ever (b. 1842)

Born in Keidan, he was trained as a teacher under Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spector and Rabbi Alexander-Moshe Lapidot. He chose not to serve as a rabbi, and became a merchant in Lazdei (Lazdijai). He compiled the book "*Even Lev*" about issues in the Talmud. (Vilna, 1900).

Flensberg, Rabbi Chaim-Yermiyahu bar Avraham (1842-1914)

Born in Keidan, he served as rabbi in Shaki (Šakiai) (1889-1914). He wrote books of sermons and on various subjects. He also published articles in *"HaLevanon"* (1879-1880), *"Hamaggid", "Hamelitz"* and other newspapers. (His most renowned was a series of 31 articles, titled "A Guide to the Perplexed of Today." ("*Mori Nevuchei HaZman HaChadash*")) His daughter was the rebbetzin Esther Rubinstein, wife of Rabbi Rubinstein of Vilna, who was known as the prodigy from Shaki.

Among his essays were "*Divrei Yermiyahu,*" homilies (Vilna 1898); "*Divrei Yermiyahu,*" second volume, about the Torah (Vilna, 1910-27); "*B'zer Hanitzakhon*" about the disagreement between rabbis Yehoshua ben Hanania and Savi Dvi-Atuna (Vilna 1883); "*She'elot Chaim,*" questions and answers, 2 volumes (Vilna 1898). "*Otzar Chaim,*" a commentary on the book *"Or Adonai"* by Rabbi Hasdai Krashkas, with interpretations, two volumes (Vilna, 1905-1909); "*Merkavot Ami*" on the Song of Songs, with commentary (Vilna 1910).

Kaidanover, Rabbi Aharon-Shmuel bar Israel ("Maharshak") (1614-1676)

Born in Keidan[127], he studied in Brisk (Brest). Rabbi Yakov of Lublin and his son Rabbi Yehoshua Heschel were among his teachers. He served as rabbi in Biala and thereafter in Vilna. He fled Vilna during the pogroms of 1648. He escaped Vilna again during the war between Sweden and Poland in 1656 and settled in Kurow, near Lublin, however, he was again overcome by evil fate and forced to flee from there.

In the interim, the Cossacks brought him nightmarish devastation. Both his daughters were murdered and all his possessions were plundered. Eventually he found refuge in Moravia and then became the rabbi in Nikolsburg (Mikulov) in 1658, and afterwards in Glogau (Glogow, Silesia), Fürth and Frankfurt am Main. In his final years he became head of the rabbinical court for Krakow and its district.

His greatest work was "*Birkat Hazevach*" on the talmudic order "*Kodashim*" (Amsterdam, 1669), which was published by his son-in-law. His critical research served as a foundation for the Talmud edition published in Frankfurt an der Oder (1697-1699) and also the Berlin edition (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1715-22).

His other books, published posthumously, include "*Birkat Shmuel,*" sermons on the Torah (Frankfurt am Main, 1682-3); "*Emunat Israel,*" questions and answers (Frankfurt am Main, 1683); "*Tiferet Shmuel,*" new interpretations of Jewish law (Frankfurt am Main, 1696). In the introduction to the book "*Brachat Hazevakh*" he described the destruction of the community of Lublin.

He died in Chmielnik (Poland) to which he had come in order to participate in the Council of the Four Lands.

Kaplan, Rabbi Avraham-Eliyahu bar Avraham-Eliyahu (1890-1924)

He was born in Keidan a few months after the death of his father. His mother was the granddaughter of Rabbi Shimon Troib. He grew up in the house of his grandfather, who was Rabbi of Keidan. He studied in the Telz (Telšiai) yeshiva for four years, after which he studied in the Kelm Talmud Torah.

From there he moved to the Slobodka yeshiva, where he studied for eight years. There he became very close to the spiritual head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Noteh-Zvi Finkel ("the grandfather") who influenced him greatly.

At the same time he acquired a vast knowledge of Hebrew literature in general and of secular subjects. His Hebrew literary style was exceptional. He wrote on philosophical issues and also wrote poetry. He was musically gifted and composed music to accompany his poems.

During the First World War, he remained in Telz and confined himself to moral issues in religious law. After the war he became active in communal affairs. He participated in the Jewish communities council and in meetings of the national board of Lithuanian Jews. He was one of the founders of the religious youth movement "Young Israel," and served as its spiritual leader.

In mid-1919 he accepted an invitation from the rabbinic college in Berlin, founded by Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer, to teach Talmud. He introduced the "Lithuanian study method" there. He also published comprehensive answers to Jewish legal questions in the monthly periodical "*Yeshurun,*" and philosophical works, with the aiming to reveal the "light" of Judaism.

He is most famous for his article "*Beikvot Hayirah*" in which he began a new commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, including everything necessary to understand the Talmud's foundation from both a scholarly and a scientific point of view. He began with an introduction,

[127] Other sources give his birthplace as Koidanov, (currently Dzerzhynsk) Belarus.

a valuable work of research in itself, published in "*Yeshurun*." But after beginning his great work, he died suddenly at age 34. He left behind a rich literary heritage in Jewish law and thought.

Rabinowitz, Meir-Michael bar Sholem (1830-1902)

Born in Keidan, he studied in Kovno in the *Nevyozer kloyz* study house under Rabbi Israel Salanter. He declined invitations to take rabbinic positions in large congregations and remained the rabbi in the small town of Shat (Šeta), for 20 years. After the fire in Shat he acceded to requests from some important people of Vilna and took a position as teacher of Jewish law there, on condition that he would not be required to render religious judgements. He lectured to advanced Torah students and held that post for 20 years.

He was a most ethical person, who refrained from issuing blanket judgments. If he declared a chicken nonkosher he would compensate the owner. He wrote novel interpretations of Jewish law, some of which were published after his death. Some of his manuscripts were published by his son (Vilna, 1903, and Jerusalem, 1931). He died in Vilna.

Rabinowitz, Moshe bar Mordechai (1863-1925)

Born in Keidan, he was head of yeshiva in Keidan, rabbi in Raguva for 23 years and in Posvol (Pasvalys) for 13 years. He left behind responsa on all sections of the "*Shulchan Aruch*" and new commentaries on both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. He died in Posvol.

Remigolsky, Rabbi Binyamin-Eliyahu (1871-1930)

Born in Keidan, he was educated in the yeshivas of Eishyshok, Volozhin and Slobodka. By 19 he was an expert on the entire Talmud. He was certified as a rabbi by Rabbi Yitzhak-Elchanan Spector. At first he engaged in trade, but later, under Rabbi Yitzhak-Elchanan's influence, he accepted the position of rabbi in Pilten (Piltene, Latvia), in Windau (Ventspils, Latvia) and thereafter in Trastina (Trstena, Slovakia), Stavisk (Stawiski, Poland), Graiva (Grajewo, Poland) and Smiatich (Siemiatycze, Poland), where he established a yeshiva. An eminent scholar, he left 62 manuscripts. His book "*Hadarat Binyamin*" included novel interpretations of Jewish laws and sermons concerning "dedications and conclusions," for various talmudic tractates (Warsaw 1930).

Under the influence of Naftaly Zvi Yehuda Berlin, he joined *Chovevei Tzion* (Lovers of Zion) and was a member of the central committee of "Mizrachi" in Poland. He died in Smiatich.

Rappoport, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nissan (1842-1938)

Born in Keidan, he studied in Kovno and Telz (Telšiai). He was certified as a rabbi by Rabbi Yitzhak-Elchanan Spector and Rabbi Alexander-Moshe Lapidot. He served as rabbi in Ragole (Ariogala) from 1876 to 1880. Thereafter he was involved in commerce, but continued to devote time to Torah study. He was the rabbi in Springfield (USA) from 1900 and did much for the improvement of the community. He passed away in Jerusalem.

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Notable Thinkers and Doers *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 213-216*

From "Yahadut Lita" Vol. 3, Tel Aviv, 1967.
Translated by Bella Golubchick and Chaim Charutz.

Einhorn, Aharon (1884-1942)

Journalist, born in Keidan. He studied Talmud until he was 17. Completed secondary school in Paris, afterwards studied at the Sorbonne. He began his career as a journalist in 1905, and from then was affiliated with "*Hazman*," "*Haynt*," "Paris Journal," "*Morgn Zhurnal*" in New York and other publications. Starting in 1912 he worked regularly for "*Haynt*." He published political articles, essays and critical reviews, and translated from French, Russian and German ("*Thirsty Gods*," by Anatole France, "*The Miser*" by Moliere and others.) He was in the Warsaw ghetto, where he hid and was shot by Nazis.

Einhorn, Joseph Isser (1866-1925)

Educator and author. Born in Keidan, he was the brother of Aharon Einhorn. He was educated in the yeshiva of Rabbi Meilis in Vilna, studied agriculture in Montpellier (France). He taught agriculture in Mikveh Israel. Was one of the founders of the newspaper "*L'accueil Zionist*."

From 1912 on he lived in Warsaw. His works include "*HaAdam*" on anatomy and physiology, (Warsaw, 1922, sixth printing, 1936); "*Baalei HaChaim*" on zoology, (three volumes, Warsaw 1922-1924); "*Torat Avodat HaAdama*" (London, 1910). He translated the book "On Heroes, Hero- Worship and the Heroic in History" by Carlyle (Moscow, 1919, 2nd printing Warsaw, 1920).

Bloshtein, Hirsh (1895-1979)

Yiddish poet. Born in Keidan to a poor tailor. His father died when he was 12. He worked as a teacher of retarded children, thus helping his mother sustain his family. In 1912 he began to publish poems. During World War I he was exiled to Ukraine along with most other Jews of the town. He published stories in "*Undzer Lebn*" in Odessa. He translated comedies for the theater "*Undzer Vinkl*" He composed a poem entitled "Rabbi Akiva." He worked as a teacher in the Caucasus. From there he moved to Minsk and was affiliated with the publications "*Vecker*" and "*Shtern*." In 1921 he returned to Lithuania and contributed to local newspapers and to Jewish newspapers in America. He put together a collection of his poems, "*Oyf Zunentrep*" ("On the Sunlit Steps," Kovno 1923.) In 1925 he emigrated to Argentina. In 1931 he returned to the USSR and settled there.

Zaks, Shneur (1816-1892)

Researcher and writer, was born in Keidan. When he was a child his parents moved to Zhager (Žagaré), where his father, Tzemach, served as rabbi, and from whom he learned Torah. He studied in Vilna and Dubno. From there he moved to Brody and met Yitzhak Arter who supported him financially and guided him in his studies. In Brody he began his literary work, publishing articles about the Jewish sages, the cultural situation of the Russian Jews and the need for an encyclopaedia of Jewish wisdom. He also published poems in the monthly periodical, "*Zion*" (1841-2). When a rumor that he had "fallen on wicked ways" reached Žagaré, his father and his wife demanded that he return home. His townsman Chaim Zak established a school for him and sent him pupils to teach Tanach and Talmud. His success in the field of education encouraged the intellectuals of Raseyn (Raseiniai) to invite him to teach in their town. He remained in Raseyn (where he made the acquaintance of Avraham Mapu) for two years and taught there. These were happy days in his life. He continued his literary work there and published an article "*Korot Mlechet HaBiur Vehapeirush*" ("*Pirchei Zion,*" Vilna, 1844), an introduction to a book comparing belief in revelation and belief in nature.

After saving some money, he moved to Berlin and devoted himself to his studies at the university, in particular to the lectures of Schelling. In Berlin he lived poorly: He earned his living by guarding the dead and reciting *kaddish* for the deceased. He published his

anthology "*Kanfei Yonah*" (Berlin, 1848), which included articles expressing a negative attitude to reforms in religion, and later the anthologies "*HaTchiyah*" (Berlin 1850-1857), "*HaPalit*" (Berlin 1850), "*HaYonah*" (Berlin 1851) and "*Kerem Chemed*" (Volumes 8 and 9, Berlin 1854-6). He also published his book "*Khikrei Lev V'Iniyannei Kadmoniyut*", Part 1, about the period of Rabbi Abba (Berlin 1851).

He lived in Berlin for 12 years, suffering financial distress. He was accepted as a tutor in the home of Baron Josef Ginzburg in Paris, for his son Naftali and afterwards for his grandson, David (on the recommendation of Dr. M. Mapu, brother of Avraham Mapu). For the next 30 years, he did not want. He established a large scientific library for his students, containing many valuable manuscripts.

He tried to establish forums for Jewish knowledge in Paris, but didn't succeed. He published the anthology "*Kikion Yonah*" there (Paris 1860), "*Sefer Tagin*" (Paris 1866) and "*HaMidrash HaKatzar*" (attributed to Rabbi Akiva), about the "*Sefer Tagin*", and the anthology "*Yayin Levanon*" (Paris 1866); also "*Shir HaShirim Asher L'rashbag* (about Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, Paris 1868). He intended to complete several more books on Judaism.

He was among the most erudite experts on medieval Jewish philosophy. He was a friend of Samuel David Luzzato, Adolf Jellinek, Abraham Geiger and Leopold Zunz[128]. He died in Paris.

Troib, Israel-Michal (1858-1926)

A writer and publisher, born in Keidan. He was the grandson of the rabbis Avraham Shimon Troib and Avli of Posvol (Pasvalys). Educated in yeshivas, he published articles in "*HaMelitz*" and "*HaMaggid.*" He emigrated to South Africa, where he published a weekly periodical in Hebrew and Yiddish "*HaKochav*"–"*Der Yiddisher Shtern*" (1903 -1908). He returned to Russia and settled in Libau and afterwards in Telzh (Telšai) He died in Berlin.

Smilg, Yosef (1848-1900)

An educator, born in Keidan, the son of Pesach. He studied in the yeshivas of Vilna and Kovno. He was certified as a rabbi, and later studied in the universities of Berlin and Leipzig and received a Ph.D. From 1880 he taught Judaic religious studies at three German gymnasia in St. Petersburg (Russia). He published a series of articles in "*HaMelitz*" including one called "The Foundation of Ethical Education" which appeared afterwards in specialized booklets. He died in St. Petersburg.

Pick, Aharon (1872-1944)

A doctor and author, born in Keidan, son of the cheder teacher David. He graduated from the Slobodka yeshiva and was about to receive certification as a rabbi, but he fell under the influence of the times and joined the young people following the enlightenment movement in Kovno. After diligent study and intense effort he obtained a matriculation certificate and went abroad to continue his education. In the interim he worked as a teacher in the Talmud Torah in Shavli (Šiauliai) and also in private homes in Vilna. He participated in communal affairs and devoted himself to collecting Yiddish folk songs.

He studied medicine in Paris and worked as a doctor in the south of France throughout World War I. He then returned to Lithuania and settled in Shavli. He became head of the internal medicine section of the municipal hospital and was active in Jewish communal life. He was a member of the Jewish municipal council and its chairman. He was also one of the founders of the Hebrew gymnasium, chairman of OZE and a founder of a summer camp for poor children. At the same time he lectured on medical topics. He published many articles on questions of medicine and prophylaxis, on Jews in medicine and medicine in sacred texts. He also published a number of literary autobiographical works, including: "*In Prison*" (*HaOlam*, 1935); "Reb Zvi the Cooper, Memories of Lilienblum's Father" (in the anthology "*Keidan,*" New York, 1930) and the story "*Summer Flowers.*"

[128] Jewish scholars and reformers of the mid-19th century.

With the annexation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union, he was persecuted for his past Zionist affiliation and fired from his job, but after a time he was appointed to the management of the municipal polyclinic. During the Nazi occupation he was in the Shavli ghetto. Until the end of his days he excelled in his positive attitude until the hardships of that life defeated him. He left behind a diary and notes from the ghetto entitled "From the Valley of Slaughter." He died in the Shavli ghetto.

Prozer, Moshe (1840-1895)

An educator, born in Keidan, the son of Shlomo Zalman. He was yeshiva-educated and a prominent pupil of his uncle, Rabbi Avraham-Ever Yoffe. He also studied in Yanove (Jonava), but after he became interested in the literature of the *Haskalah (*enlightenment movement*)*, he was forced to leave town.

He relocated to Ponevezh and Vilna, where he studied in a yeshiva and learned Russian and German from students in the rabbinic college. He intended to walk to Zhitomir to apply to the rabbinic college there. Because he didn't have the appropriate certificates, he returned to Ponevezh and became a teacher. There he became acquainted with Yehuda Leib Gordon.

In 1863 he came to Kovno, where he met Mapu. He wrote articles for "*HaMelitz*" and made a living as a private tutor. He was a supporter of Lilienblum. When he travelled to Odessa, he helped Y. Lipkin and Herman Shapiro, a *cheder* teacher in Kovno, go abroad to continue their education. He also helped many others seeking education.

In 1870 he served as a Hebrew teacher in Berman's school in St. Petersburg. After that he was invited by Baron Günzburg to teach his sons and to teach in the orphanage he had founded. He also served as a permanent assistant for "*HaMelitz.*"

Richards (Rabinovich), Bernard Gershon (1877-1971)

Author and editor, born in Keidan, he emigrated to the United States when he was 14. He served on the editorial staff of various newspapers. He edited a Yiddish newspaper in Boston. Later he crossed over to the English press and became famous for his articles, written in a philosophical spirit. He won fame for his book ("The Discourses of Keidansky"), a collection of descriptions of immigrant lives. He joined the Zionist movement at its beginning and was active as a publicist for Zionism.

He became an editor of the Zionist newspaper "*The Maccabean*". He was a member of the executive council of the Zionist Organization of America. He was also among the founding members of the American Jewish Congress, and served as its secretary. He was the secretary of the American delegation within the Committee of Jewish Delegations during the Versailles peace conference. He also established the Jewish Information Bureau in New York.

Schlesinger, Benjamin (1876-1932)

A labor leader, born in Keidan, he emigrated to the United States when he was 15. He was a worker and was active in a trade union. At 17 he became leader of the Watchmakers' Association, and became active in the Socialist Labor Party. He was among the founders of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and its president for 14 years. He led several strikes and represented the American labor movement at international congresses and government meetings. He died in the USA.

Shlapobersky, Shmuel (1882-1949)

A communal worker, born in Keidan, son of Yehuda. He studied in the *cheder*, and worked in a pharmacy. He sat as a non-matriculating student in St. Petersburg and completed a legal degree there. He was active in the Zionist movement from his youth. He lived in Kovno from 1918 and was a member of the municipal council and the Zionist Center of Lithuania. He published articles on economic subjects. In 1936 he made *aliya*, worked in agriculture in Even Yehuda and after 1940, in Petach Tikvah. He was active in the municipality and was chairman of the General Zionists there. He died in Petach Tikvah.

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A Tribute to Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber *Keidan Yizkor Book p 217*

Sheynke Chittin, Kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Bella Golubchik

If I shut my eyes I can conjure up in my memory a picture of our little town. The Smilga river we loved so much, meandering beneath the bridge, we loved it so dearly because it served as the gathering point for our branch of *Hashomer Hatzair*, the lively and energetic youth movement.

How far have I come from those days, when I made *aliya*, to now? More than 40 years have passed. Much has happened in this stormy time. The Jews of Keidan were wiped from the earth with unbelievable cruelty. All that remains is a hillock, a heap of bones – a mass grave at the edge of town, on the road to Dotnuva.

Here I would like to mention a few aspects of the personality of the rabbi of Keidan, Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber of blessed memory. The day I remember most clearly is when I stood on the threshold of his home. I, a member of *Hashomer Hatzair*, noted nonbelievers, was going to bid farewell to the rabbi before making *aliya* to Israel. I knocked on the door and entered.

The room was large, modestly furnished. The rabbi sat in a corner next to a large table, reading a book. His noble face, adorned by a white beard, and his radiant personality enchanted me. I stood before him, dressed in the complete uniform of "*Hashomer Hatzair*" as if for a parade. I was a little confused by my own *chutzpa*. I said, "Rabbi, I have come to say goodbye, before making *aliya*." He looked at me and said, "I know that. I even know who you are." (I thought it must most surely be my brother-in-law Prusak, his secretary, who told him.)

The rabbi rose from his seat, walked about a little, stood before me and said, "I certainly have a difference of opinion with your youth movement. However, the building of Eretz Israel is above all else." Then he blessed me. When I reached the doorway I turned my head once more to look at his wonderful visage. The rabbi smiled and called out to me: "Build a beautiful land for us!" And I thought at the time: If only there could be many such rabbis in Israel.

A few years passed, and I heard that his young son Isaac had made *aliya* and become a member of Kibbutz Amir in the Upper Galilee. How I would have liked to meet with him and ask how his father had reacted to the path he had chosen; but to my sorrow and great pain our meeting took place on the shore of the Kinneret, when his lifeless body lay before me. Blessed be his memory!

As time passes I remember certain incidents connected with Rabbi Feinsilber, of blessed memory, one of which I would like to record. On Lithuania's Independence Day, when even a government minister participated in the parade, the rabbi was called on to bring greetings from Keidan's Jews. He opened his speech with a call to the Lithuanians to learn from the Jews, and to write in their prayer books: "If I forget thee, O Vilnius, may my right hand forget its skill!"[129] This made a mighty impression. The applause lasted a very long time. The next day a photograph of the rabbi appeared in all the newspapers, which also praised his wisdom and his devotion to the motherland of Lithuania.

Who could possibly have imagined that with the passage of a few years, those same people would behave towards the Jews as murderers and wild animals. Rabbi Feinsilber was among the first sacrificed. Great is the pain and the sorrow. Pity for those who have gone but are not forgotten.[130]

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[129] A paraphrase of the often-said Hebrew prayer: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill." (Psalms 137:5.)

[130] Talmud tractate Sanhedrin, page 111.

Rabbi Avraham Halevy Sochen *Keidan Yizkor Book p 218*

Dr. Mordechai Sochen (Minneapolis)

Translated by Miriam Erez, Israel

My father, may he rest in peace, Rabbi Avraham Halevy Sochen, came to Keidan at the end of the last [19th] century, and married my mother, may she rest in peace, Feyge, daughter of Reb Moshe Yitzhak Wallek, a teacher of Gemara for as long as he resided in Keidan.

My father, too, began as a *melamed* [tutor], but he had a hobby: sermons. All my life I recall him sitting in the evenings, poring over books and writing biblical commentaries. On Sabbaths, between afternoon and evening prayers, he would preach in the synagogue with great success, before a large congregation. He cast a spell over his audience with his appearance, his voice, his intonation, and his words of Torah wisdom.

After the decree arrived ordering that Jews be deported from Lithuania with the outbreak of World War I, our family wandered to distant Ukraine. There too, he was engaged, as usual, in religious matters; preaching everywhere he went, he gathered an admiring crowd that held him in high respect.

When we returned to Keidan after the war, we found an apartment "across the river" (Neviazhe), and there in the synagogue, he served as rabbi, preacher, and teacher of the daily page of Gemara for no pay. He earned his livelihood as manager of the community office, which was a state institution during the period of Jewish autonomy in independent Lithuania. When we moved back into Keidan proper, he continued to preach in the Great Synagogue every single Sabbath. He also gave classes in Gemara at the yeshiva founded by the town rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber, righteous one of blessed memory.

In 1925, he decided to go to America, where he served as rabbi in several synagogues in New York until his death in 1942.

He left behind hand-written religious manuscripts, two of which were edited and ready for publication. One was published under the title *"Derech Avraham" (Abraham's Way),* a book of sermons on the weekly Torah portions, festivals, holy days and prayers, and appreciations of the Talmud book *Nashim* and the tractates *Baba Kama*, *Baba Metzia*, and *Baba Batra*. The second manuscript was titled "*Eshel Avraham" (Abraham's Tamarisk)*, a 400-page volume on the 613 Torah commandments, also handwritten.

Following our departure from Keidan, our family scattered over four continents. My brother Yehiel, may he rest in peace, emigrated to Palestine in 1924, passed through all the pioneering phases and finally settling in Raanana, where he died in 1970. My sister Esther, may she rest in peace, remained in Lithuania and was murdered together with her husband and young son, by the hateful enemy, may his name be blotted out. The eldest son, Baruch Azgad, a war refugee, managed to make his way to Israel, where he served as director of the Nazareth Illit education department. My brother Shlomo went to South Africa, where he still resides. My sister Reizel and my mother and I came to America. My sister married Rabbi Ephraim Berman and raised a family of orthodox rabbis on American soil.

The author of these lines also lives in the American diaspora and is engaged in Jewish education as director of the Minneapolis Talmud Torah [community Hebrew school].

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Reb Meishe Chone Shamesh *Keidan Yizkor Book p 219*

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Reb Meishe Chone Shamesh, of blessed memory, was one of the most significant Jews in Keidan. He was humble, modest and self-effacing. He was not very conspicuous outside of the *cheder*, where he taught the children, but his efforts to educate the younger Jewish generation of Keidan were enormous. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to guess that 90% of the town's boys learned in his *cheder*. Whoever studied with Reb Meishe Chone certainly learned to read and write both Hebrew and Yiddish, as well as a chapter of *chumash*[131] with Rashi's commentary, and many even learned the whole Bible. Reb Meishe Chone dedicated his whole life to the children in the *cheder*. He spared no effort. Especially with children who didn't learn easily, he tried to teach them the most elementary things, such as reading and writing Yiddish and Hebrew, a little arithmetic, the special accents for prayers and the *chumash* with Rashi.

Hundreds of those born in Keidan owe him a debt of gratitude to this day for the elementary education they managed to acquire. For a long time, especially after the First World War, the *cheder* of Reb Meishe Khone of blessed memory, was the only institution in our town where Keidan's children could receive such an education. Much later a *Tarbut* Hebrew school was established, also a "*kultur lige*" Yiddish school and a pro-gymnasium.

Although the *cheder* lessons lasted from morning until the late evening hours, Reb Meishe Chone also found time to participate in sports. These included bathing and swimming in the river in summertime (he was an excellent swimmer), and morning and evening hikes throughout the year.

Each day after morning prayers he would organize a hike from his house to the train station and back. And at night, after lessons in the *cheder* and the evening meal, a nighttime hike on the bridge over the Neviazhe river. He kept this up throughout the year.

There are those who say that bathing in the river was actually the cause of his death. In the last year of his life, on the eve of Yom Kippur, he went to bathe in the river. The weather was already autumnal and no longer warm. He caught a chill, came down with pneumonia and never recovered.

Reb Meishe Chone was also an enthusiastic Zionist. Together with Torah, love of god and the good moral behavior that he helped his pupils acquire, he implanted in them a love of Zion and of the land of our fathers. As we learned about Eretz Israel in the Torah lessons, we could feel his longing for our ancestral land. It is such a pity that he couldn't make *aliya* to witness the establishment of an independent Israel in its own land.

Finally, it is impossible to end this chapter without mentioning his faithful, devoted wife, Rivka, of blessed memory. She was his dedicated helper. Reb Meishe Chone was a sickly person, and she looked after him with love, dedication and devotion. She was concerned about every aspect of his health and also helped maintain the household and manage the family budget. Thanks to her dedication he was able to fully devote himself to his life's aim – teaching Torah to children.

May their memory be blessed.

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[131] The five books of the Torah.

Portraits from the Human Landscape *Keidan Yizkor book pp 220-224*

Pesach Weitzer-Chittin, Kibbutz Beit Zera

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Chana Landsberg, of blessed memory

Chana Landsberg was born in Keidan in 1893. She was a very talented girl. She completed the Russian gymnasium for girls in Kovno with distinction in 1911. She excelled in all the subjects she studied.

The incident I want to relate happened as follows.

Chana studied in a class with the daughter of the governor of Kovno, Veriovkin, a Russian aristocrat, who was very liberal towards the Jews. Chana and the governor's daughter were on very friendly terms, and both were outstanding students.

In the final exams Chana rightly received top marks. The governor's daughter also received very good marks, although some were lower than Chana's. It would have been only fair for Chana to receive the gold medal, and for the governor's daughter to receive the silver. But for the pedagogic council, it was not logical that Jewish Chana should be first and the governor's daughter should come second. The council decided to award the gold to the governor's daughter, giving Chana the silver. Out of modesty, Chana accepted this verdict and after graduation returned home to Keidan.

A week passed, and the Governor's daughter came to see Chana in Keidan. She felt deep remorse because of the injustice that the pedagogic council had done to Chana. They were both happy to meet again and chat. They had spent the whole night reminiscing about their years at the gymnasium, when the governor's daughter began to cry bitterly because of the injustice done to Chana. Chana had a hard time calming her friend, because the governor's daughter had a high moral standard. She spent a few days in Keidan and after that returned to Kovno, but they continued to correspond until the outbreak of the First World War.

Chaim Ronder

Chaim Ronder was born in Keidan in 1902 to a family with many children and deep roots in Jewish tradition. They lived at the edge of the town on the road to Kovno. All around their home and their large vegetable garden stretched green fields. The open fields and the smell of the earth not only hardened his body, but also strongly influenced his character. He received his basic education, like most of the Jewish children, in the *cheder* and the Jewish primary school in Keidan.

The First World War interrupted his schooling but he made up for this gap in his education by reading many books, which broadened his spiritual world. I got to know Chaim, who was a quiet lad, a devoted student and especially diligent at all the tasks he undertook.

His father died leaving Chaim an orphan. While still young he began to support his family. He worked in agriculture, mainly growing cucumbers. He was very devoted to his family.

Chaim showed exceptional courage from an early age, and never allowed an injury or slight from a gentile to go unanswered. Because of this, or perhaps in spite of it, he earned their respect. In 1921 he was conscripted into the Lithuanian army, where he served in the cavalry.

The Second World War found Chaim in Keidan.

Here, from his own mouth – as he was almost the only eyewitness to these horrors – is the nightmarish story of the cruel massacre of the Jews of Keidan and the adjoining towns of Jasvin, Zheim and Shat (Josvainiai, Žeimiai and Šėta).

On August 15, 1941, the Germans and the Lithuanians transferred all of Keidan's Jews and those from nearby areas, 3,700 souls, men, women and infants, to a prison at what had been Totleben's large granary, near the road to Dotnuva. They were tortured there with starvation and beatings for 13 days. Chaim related hair-raising descriptions of the tortures, the sighs and groans of the wounded and the sick, and listed their names, describing how they rolled about on the ground and writhed in pain. During the first days, Chaim tried to call for resistance, come what might, but most of the prisoners were broken, shattered and apathetic. Chaim remained a voice crying in the wilderness.

Eventually Chaim decided to flee. He opened a space in the roof tiles and, risking his life, he went through the opening and jumped from the granary roof. No one dared follow,[132] although he had tried to convince some to join him. He was slightly hurt in the jump but managed to escape through the forest.

On 5 Elul, 5701 – August 28, 1941– the cursed Nazis and Lithuanians murdered all the Jews of Keidan and its surroundings, 3,700 souls. May god avenge their blood.

Before Chaim left the place of slaughter, he managed to witness over two hours how the murderers shot Keidan's Jews. Some were torn to pieces and thrown, still alive, into the pit. From that bitter day, Chaim lived on the run. For 3 full years he lived under the shadow of death in the forests, crossed rivers, lived in bunkers. He was surrounded by German soldiers hundreds of times. The Germans even put a bounty of 20,000 marks on his head! He fought alone, gun in hand, and brought down more than a few Germans, but as he writes in his letter, they never managed to catch him.

Eventually Chaim joined the partisans and fought with them against the Germans. On July 31, 1944, when Chaim returned to Keidan with the liberating Red Army, he visited the mass grave of the martyrs of Keidan near the Dotnuva road, a grave 90 meters long, 3 meters wide and 3 meters deep, planted with barley by the Lithuanians.

Chaim writes: "I imagine I see my old mother, my brother, my sister, my relatives, my acquaintances, the Jews of Keidan, crying out to me from under the earth: 'Chaim! Avenge our spilled blood!' I vowed right there to do so. And I keep this oath. For this reason I went to work for the N.K.V.D., and to this very day I take revenge on every Hitlerist and every Lithuanian murderer who falls into my hands."

When I imagine Chaim wandering the Lithuanian forests alone, a solitary Jew, pursued with a price on his head, starving, with danger threatening him from all sides, not for a day or a month, but for more than two years, summer and winter, until he joined the partisans – tears choke me up. I can't find myself. I tremble with emotion and think what a brave, daring man was Chaim Ronder.

He had blonde hair and blue eyes; he was powerful, speaking clear Lithuanian and Polish. Most important, he was adroit and courageous. It is possible that all these traits helped him to fight and escape at the final hour. Perhaps he sometimes found temporary refuge with Lithuanian peasants, who thought he was a Lithuanian and helped him.

After the war, Chaim rented a room in Kovno, and every day he went to the train station, searching for survivors and providing for their needs devotedly.

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[132] Other accounts report that Ronder escaped after the massacre with one other man.

Chaim received a certificate from the main headquarters of the partisans, certifying that he was involved with them over two and a half years, participating actively in clashes against the Nazis. He also received a medal from the Russian government on the 25th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. This was awarded posthumously.

Chaim was imbued with deep Zionist feeling, but the desire for retribution against the Nazi foe motivated him to devote himself to avenging the innocent blood of Keidan's Jews. He generously helped survivors of the Holocaust with money and practical aid to cross borders and make *aliya*.

In reply to his sister Mina, residing in Israel (long may she live), who asked why he didn't make *aliya* himself in that time, Chaim answered: "Those were dark days. I ran about hungry, in tatters, with torn shoes, my feet swollen and bleeding, with a gun in hand and only one thought gnawing at my brain – to take vengeance! My whole being was filled with this one word only – vengeance. Remember what Amalek did to you!"[133]

Eventually, his health degenerated. The war years, the hunger, cold and damp in the bunkers seriously affected his health.

In 1954 Chaim began his own struggle to make *aliya*. Despite the fact that he never had access to military secrets, the authorities refused him permission for 10 years. In 1964 he finally was granted permission. His excitement knew no bounds, but sadly, 10 days before his planned departure, he succumbed to a deadly illness.

And we, your friends, descendants of Keidan in Israel – we so anticipated your arrival, Chaim, our hero! We so looked forward to seeing you, to hearing from your lips about your deeds to avenge the innocent blood of Keidan's Jews. Our hearts grieve for this.

His soul breathed its last on March 12, 1964 and he was buried in the blood-soaked land of Lithuania. He never managed to make *aliya* – the aim of his tempestuous soul. May the soul of Chaim Ronder be bound up with the souls of the heroes of Israel and the avengers of innocent, spilled Jewish blood.

Tzadok Shlapobersky, hy'd[134]

Tzadok was born in Keidan in 1899 to a large, wealthy family that excelled in the spirit of tradition and Zionism. His eldest brother, Shmuel Isaac, who was considerably older than he and was a perpetual student, was one of the Zionist activists in the town. I had known Tzadok from our very early childhood, when we studied together in the *cheder* of the teacher Shmuel-Yehuda Eides of blessed memory.

Tzadok was tall and strong beyond his age, handsome and easygoing, always prepared to help another. He didn't hesitate to fight back against the gentile boys who harassed Jewish children. You always felt safe in his presence.

We met often when we returned from Russia after the First World War. Tzadok was very involved in the communal life of the town, and especially in Jewish life. For many years he was a member of the municipality, respected in all sections of society, by Jews and Christians alike. He was especially prominent in the fire brigade, where for many years he served as chairman and commander of the firefighters.

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[133] Deuteronomy 25:17.

[134] Abbreviation for "May god avenge his blood" – i.e., he was murdered.

He was tall and broad-shouldered, a really handsome man. He was well acquainted with the Lithuanian authorities, and when local Jews needed something from the officials they turned to him. Tzadok used to settle matters cordially, with no eye to reward. He was the first to volunteer, whether for a film show in aid of a communal institution, or for other community events. And the community had many needs.

Then dark days fell upon Lithuanian Jews. The Red Army entered Lithuania in 1940. The political situation was very complicated. The Jews suffered twice as much as other groups because they were mainly urban citizens. In those difficult times Tzadok increased his activities with the other activists trying to help the Jews of Keidan. This continued until the summer of 1941.

Black clouds darkened Jewish skies across Europe, including Lithuania, and one morning – that horrifying, bitter day, 5 Elul, 5701 – August 28, 1941 – all the innocent Jews of Keidan and its environs – 3,700 souls – men, women and infants – were taken out to be massacred by the Dotnuva road, past the ancient Jewish cemetery.

The Lithuanian murderers, under the guidance of the cursed Nazis, in cold blood and with indescribable cruelty, shot at the Jews with machine guns alongside a 90-meter long pit that the Lithuanians had prepared beforehand. They were all slaughtered; many were cast into the grave still alive.

This is how our heroic townsman, Chaim Ronder – the same Chaim Ronder who survived by jumping off Totleben's granary roof, where the Jews of Keidan were imprisoned before being led to the slaughter – described the final moments in the life of Tzadok Shlapobersky:

> "I must dedicate a special account of those sad days to Tzadok Shlapobersky. His name sets an example of bravery, for me and for all of us. He has entered the annals of history of the Jews of Keidan...Tzadok was the one who in the last minutes before his death, dragged the German commander into the pit and injured him. At that moment, the shooting stopped and policemen, wanting to save the commander, jumped into the pit with their bayonets. A life-and-death struggle followed. As a result, Tzadok bit the throat of one of the policemen, who fell like a dog on the spot. He also injured a second policeman, who died a few days later. Because of this, they stabbed Tzadok with their bayonets till his body became like a sieve. He was the only one who died as a hero and took vengeance on the bloodthirsty dogs."

Chaim Ronder's final words: "Tzadok's memory will shine in our hearts forever."

Our dear brother, Tzadok, you fell as a hero, like the legendary Samson, and in the final moments of your innocent life you, like he, cried out, "let my soul die with this cursed Nazi!" And with this you passed away.

May the soul of Tzadok Shlapobersky, hy"d, be bound up with the souls of the heroes of Israel and the avengers of innocent, spilled Jewish blood.

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Zvi Lipschitz, hy'd [135] *Keidan Yizkor Book p 225-226*
Ben-Moshe (Johannesburg)

Originally published in the Keidaner Sick Benefit & Benevolent Society jubilee book, 1950. Translated by Andrew Cassel

The young Zvi Lipschitz, from Kfar Etzion, was a Keidaner *landsman*. He was born in 1919 in the town of Yasven (Josvainiai), near Keidan, and came to South Africa in 1934. He was a member of the local "*Hapoel Hamizrachi*" and in 1945 he left for Eretz Israel. He was killed on 4 Iyar, 5708 [May 13, 1948] during the heroic defense of Kfar Etzion. Zvi was a son of Baruch and Alte Lipschitz from Johannesburg. His father died in Johannesburg around the same time that his son fell in Eretz Israel.

When I remember Zvi Lipschitz, I recall someone I thought of both as my friend and as my rabbi; my friend who believed in the Zionist idea and the rebirth of a Jewish state, and my rabbi whose soul burned with enthusiastic fervor and devotion to his ideals.

He still looms before my eyes as in life. His finely chiseled, elegant head, the black locks of hair that were always a bit tousled and the deep, black, melancholy eyes that were always overcast with a thin mist.

I believe our first meeting took place right after he joined the *Hapoel Hamizrachi* party. He approached me for advice about his secular education. He had plans to go to university and thereby, as he expressed it, seek a synthesis between Judaism and secular knowledge. Not having the opportunity to carry out that plan he decided to undertake university studies on his own. I gave him the necessary books and he, with diligence and enthusiasm, threw himself into the work. I was impressed by his great ability, and I proposed try to arrange for his admittance to university. But he came to me one day and said, "It is no use." His future was tied to Eretz Israel, and therefore it was his duty to learn a trade that would be useful in the building of the land. He decided on carpentry. Yet he did not abandon his dream of obtaining a wider education, and he continued to read and learn. In that time he was also participating actively in the *Hapoel Hamizrachi* movement, whose activist and missionary he became. I often heard his lectures to grownups and young people. How much passion, how much conviction and faith did he impart to them. Whether his listeners agreed with him or not, they were always carried away by his enthusiasm.

Speeches alone weren't enough for Zvi Lipschitz, however. For him his ideal was as real as life itself, and it gave him the thirst for life. He decided to leave for Eretz Israel. And although his movement was sorely in need of such an important and devoted activist, he received its blessing to follow through with his plan. He traveled to Eretz Israel and settled in Kfar Etzion – one of the hardest and most dangerous kibbutzim in the land, surrounded by innumerable hostile Arab villages. The kibbutz had already been destroyed once by the Arabs, but this did not stop Zvi from choosing such a dangerous outpost.

For a short time I took great pleasure in his frequent letters, which he would write to many of his friends, and later fate brought us together in Eretz Israel. I visited him few times in Kfar Etzion. Each of those visits is engraved in my memory, because it revealed to me the other Zvi, not the dreamer and inspirer, but the builder and creator. I remember his heavy, confident pace as he walked his land, his devotion and pride in each tree growing in the hilly desert, in each building that appeared on the stony hill of Kfar Etzion. He was particularly concerned with construction, and the last time I saw him he was busy with building a shed, which would also serve as a strategic point in case of Arab attack. I remember well how he described how they had tested a heavy machine gun against the special blocks of concrete used during construction. He spoke about the defense of the kibbutz, and about matters

[135] Hebrew abbr. for "May God avenge his blood"

which, in those times, under the terror of the British power, were to be kept strictly secret. That was our last intimate conversation, and fate decided that defending the kibbutz was also to be his last deed. He fell amid the burning ruins of the kibbutz together with more than 100 of his comrades, who gave their young, blossoming lives in the defense of the holy hills of Hebron. May God avenge his blood.

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Holocaust and Heroism
שואה וגבורה

Massacre and Resistance
טבח והתנגדות

Roads of Suffering and Struggle
דרך ייסורים ומאבק

Embers from The Fire
אודים מוצלים מאש

Massacre and Resistance
טבח והתנגדות

The Destruction of Keidan *Keidan Yizkor book, pp 229-233*
David Wolpe

Originally published in the Yiddish journal, "Fun Letstn Khurbn" in Munich, 1948; and in English in 1950 by the Keidaner Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society of Johannesburg.

By June 24, within days after Germany launched its attack on the Soviet Union, Keidan was in German hands. Two months later, all that remained of the Jewish population there was a large grave.

Only three Jewish eyewitnesses to the tragedy survived the dark Nazi period. These three men were later able to recount what happened there. I am here recording their words, and trying to reconstruct as accurately as possible the holocaust of the Jews of Keidan.

With the outbreak of the German-Russian war, there emerged in Keidan, as in other parts of Lithuania, the underground Lithuanian fifth column. Fascists and hooligans, realizing that the Nazi beast had broken loose and was on the march across the German-Lithuanian border, began organizing themselves into the notorious Lithuanian "partisan" groups. Immediately preparations were made by them to receive their long awaited masters from the West. A leading part among the partisans was played by the professionals and the educated – by doctors, chemists, teachers, government officials, as well as their sons – the high school and university youths and pupils of the local Technicum and others. The Keidan "partisans" were headed by two notorious Lithuanians, Povylius and Markunas, both sons of past mayors in the time of the old fascist Lithuanian government. The three brothers Vacys, Juozas and Stepas Šulcas, who lived on the horse market square, were also leading members of the "partisans" of Keidan, and so was Vaclovas Lačinskas, a carpenter of Jasvener [Josvainių] Street. All these were particularly active in the murder and plunder of Jews.

The Jews of Keidan sensed that the atmosphere was charged with impending murder and pogrom. The good neighbors of the yesterday changed overnight. As time crept on, panic began mounting in Jewish homes. There was nobody to offer any advice or consolation. The Jews hid in their houses like hunted animals. Still, young people tried to flee and reach the Soviet lines, in order to enlist in the Russian army. They were shot at by Lithuanians, and a number were killed. Others were murdered on the roads by marauding Lithuanians. Only a small number managed to reach the Soviet lines and enlist in the army. Several won distinction in battle, and some died heroically on the battlefield, such as Izia Gladstein and others. An appreciable number of fleeing Jews came across the German army and had no alternative but to return to Keidan. One of them, a very gifted Jewish student, Nisan Zaltzburg, in desperation hanged himself on his return flight, in the nearby village of Shat.

As soon as the Germans entered Keidan they immediately decreed that all Jews should wear yellow patches. Jews were forbidden to walk on pavements or speak to Lithuanians. There were other, similar restrictions as well.

The first organized bloody action by Lithuanians was the rounding up of 100 Jews, alleged communists. They were marched in their underwear through the village and shot in the Babėnai (Borer) woods, about two miles from the town. The names known to me of those who were shot are: Beno Ronder; Gutman Bloomberg; Jacob Wolpert; Moishe Zalmanowitz with his two daughters Pesse and Bune; Polones the chemist; David Prusak; Avrohom Itche Dinershul; Shmulke the cab-driver (I cannot recollect his surname); and Jonah Shapiro.

A few more episodes from the first days of occupation: Meike Berger, a cinema owner, was beaten up so badly by Lithuanians that he died shortly after being taken to hospital. Reuven Chesler, a tailor, ran to his parents in "*brom*" (at the synagogue yard, where fowls used to be slaughtered) and was shot at the gate by a Lithuanian.

A few days later Jews were driven to forced labor. The majority were employed at the airport, unpacking bombs left by the Russians. The guards were supplied by the newly formed Lithuanian police. Lithuanian civilians watched from a distance to gloat over the misery of the Jews. Some bombs exploded and about ten Jews were killed.

Other Jews worked in the neighboring government estates, such as Pelednagiai (where in the 1920s the first *hachshara* [Zionist training] farm in Lithuania was established), Podborok, Žirgynas, and others.

Jewish girls were taken to the German officers' club where they were criminally assaulted.

The brutal tortures and murder continued unabated and the Jews lived in constant terror of what the next day might bring.

On July 23rd, Lithuanians with the assistance of a few Germans loaded some 200 Jews on six trucks, allegedly to transport them to their labor destinations. After the Jews failed to return, members of their families endeavored to learn of their fates from Lithuanian leaders, but to no avail. A Lithuanian was later bribed with a large sum of money and he brought them the news that on the very same day (July 23) all 200 were shot in the Taučiūnai woods, 10 kilometers from Keidan. The Jews of Keidan did not want to believe the story, and hoped that their nearest and dearest would still return. When a good few days had passed, however, they realized that the news was authentic.

Among these 200 were: Israel Kahn and his three sons, Zalman, Feivl and Ortchik; Ortchik Karnowsky, who lived near the horse market; the two butcher brothers, Yankl and Leizer together with Leizer's son Bine; the chemist Kagan and his brother-in-law the hardware merchant Pruzhansky; Israel Toiber the baker, with his wife and little daughter; Mina Shilkiner who had a stall at the market.

Shortly after the above event, the mayor of Keidan, Povylius (who had been reinstated to his former post by the Germans) summoned the leading Jews of Keidan: Tzadok Shlapobersky, Chaim Ronder, Chaim Blumberg, Abrasha Kagan, Sroelov, Sholem Chait and others. Povylius informed them that within twenty-four hours all Jews must leave their homes and move into the vicinity of Smilga Street. Smilga Street, together with the synagogue, the synagogue-yard and the neighboring alleys up to Langer [Gedimino] Street were fenced off by a barbed wire fence, and this became the ghetto of Keidan.

On the day the Jews moved into the ghetto, the Lithuanians brought to Keidan all the Jews of the neighboring villages of Shat and Zheim, all in all about a thousand people. Among them were also the Jews of other nearby villages, who had fled to Shat and Zheim at the outbreak of war. The overcrowding in the ghetto of Keidan became unbearable. In addition the food supplies of almost everybody were exhausted. Famine and typhus were imminent.

The mayor imposed a tax on the Jews and threatened extermination unless the required amount became available. The Jews of Keidan gathered all their jewelry and money and gave whatever they could lay their hands on, in the hope that that might improve their lot. The hoped-for improvement did not come about. The Jews of Keidan were forced within a short period to contribute taxes on several other occasions.

Some of the youth of Keidan realized the desperate situation and urged leading Jews to flee and hide in the woods or elsewhere. The community leaders, however, were opposed to such a step. They thought that it would endanger the whole ghetto. They were under the impression that all the Germans wanted was Jewish labor, and it was therefore unwise to risk one's life.

August 15 put an end to all illusions and hopes. On this day, Lithuanian police and "partisans," under the command of a few Germans, drove all Jews from their homes into the

synagogue-yard. All men over the age of fourteen were marched off four abreast to the huge brick stables of Zhirgynas in the park, which had been a stud farm. The women and children, the old and the ailing were packed on carts and carted away. Even women with newborn babies were ordered out of the hospital and brought to the yard. The Lithuanian intelligentsia flocked to witness the spectacle as if it were a circus. Zhirgynas, where the Jewish men were taken, was heavily guarded by Lithuanians. The Jews were kept there for thirteen days. The stables were terribly overcrowded and with the exception of coffee, the Jews received no food at all. The Lithuanians paid the prisoners a few visits and divested them of anything they may still have had left.

When the Jews were driven from the ghetto to the synagogue-yard, Benzy Birger suggested to a few of the younger ones that they should try and escape past the Smilga creek. Not finding any adherents to his plan, he himself fled. For days he hid in the bush. Later, from a hiding place he witnessed executions of Jews. After the slaughter he went to some peasant friends (he was a farmer) and was hidden by them. He survived the Nazis and lives at present in Keidan.

On Thursday, August 28, 1941, about 200 Lithuanians assembled at Zhirgynas. They were railway workers and police, all armed with rifles and hand grenades. First the young and strong Jews were separated, grouped in batches of sixty and taken behind the Catholic cemetery, close to Dotnuva Road, near the Smilga creek. (The Jewish cemetery is higher on a hill above the creek.) There a huge pit was ready which had taken Russian prisoners of war five days to dig. The Jews were forced to strip at the mouth of this pit, and the Lithuanians directed machine guns at them. At the time of this shooting, tractor motors were started in order to silence the shrieks of horror which could even be heard in Keidan. Many wounded fell into this grave, and a number who had not been hit were pushed in and buried alive. This spectacle was watched by prominent members of Lithuanian society of Keidan, such as the principal of the high school, Selava, the Mayor Povylius, and the young Catholic priest was also present.

Rabbi Aaron Galin (the son-in-law of Reb Shlomo Feinsilber, Rabbi of Keidan and chairman of the Rabbinical Association of Lithuania), who was also in Zhirgynas, was among the first batch. Standing at the pit he addressed the Jews. He said that the Jewish people had already experienced a great many trials. When he cried that "the innocent blood of those murdered will not remain silent" the shooting commenced.

During the execution there were attempts at fighting back. Among the second batch was Tzadok Shlapobersky, a man of about forty. He had been an officer in the Lithuanian army and had taken part in the fight for Lithuania's liberation. He had also been a city councilor for many years and was friendly with the Lithuanians. A German officer was in charge of the massacre. Shlapobersky asked to say a few words. The German started to beat him. Shlapobersky grabbed the German, pulled him into the pit and began strangling him. A Lithuanian with an automatic rifle who stood nearby immediately jumped to the German's assistance. His name was Raudonis, the owner of the Hotel Vilnius in the building of the Jewish photographer Joffe. Shlapobersky let the German go, jumped on the Lithuanian and bit his throat. Shlapobersky was pierced by the bayonets of other Lithuanians and his body was cut to shreds. The gasping Raudonis was immediately taken to hospital where he died two days later. The Lithuanians accorded him an imposing funeral. A number of enthusiastic addresses were held in which the Lithuanian bandit was described as "the last victim of Jewish power."

After Shlapobersky's heroic death, the murderers became more brutal but also more cautious, leading Jews to the pit in smaller groups.

In one of the groups there was the locksmith, Boruch Meir Chesler, the proprietor of a radio and cycle store and locksmith shop. At the pit he wrenched an automatic pistol from the hands of a Lithuanian, but unfortunately he did not know how to use it. At the same moment, two boys fled toward the creek, but they as well as Chesler were shot dead.

The men were followed by women and bigger children, in batches of forty. The blood-thirst of the murderers kept on mounting. Rachel Shisiansky, the wife of Aba Shisiansky, the miller, pleaded that she be shot first before her children, whereupon the children were wrenched from her and shot before her eyes, and only then did the beasts shoot her. The elderly and ailing women were brought in cars and were buried alive. The small children were thrown like balls in the air by Lithuanians and caught on the bayonets.

Lithuanians of Keidan related later that after the pit was covered with a bit of earth, the surface heaved up and down as if a live pulse was pulsating in the mass grave, and blood seeped through to the surface. The murderers used rollers to press the earth down in order to arrest the heaving of the bloody earth made alive.

Jews of Keidan who visited the mass grave after liberation stated that the square grave remained higher than the surrounding surface, as if the holy grave wished to separate from the unclean soil which surrounds it.

The shooting of the Jews continued until the evening.

Fearing the bitter end that was in store for him, the butcher Hirsh Lebiotkin hanged himself while still in Zhirgynas.

Of all the Jews who were locked up in Zhirgynas, only two escaped by some miracle: Chaim Ronder, born in Keidan in 1903, and Shmuel Smolsky, born in Posen, a refugee who fled Poland in 1939 and settled in Keidan. Ronder and Smolsky hid themselves behind planks which were lying in Zhirgynas. The clothing of the murdered Jews was brought to Zhirgynas after the slaughter and the place was guarded. The best items of clothing were plundered by the leaders of the mass murder. The remaining clothes were sorted and later sold cheaply to the Lithuanian population. On the same night of the massacre the two Jews, who lay hidden behind the planks and under piles of clothing, used a penknife to carve a hole in the shingled roof of the stable, took off their boots and lowered themselves on a rope made from torn sheets. Luckily they were not seen by the guards and succeeded in reaching the Podborik wood.

Thus, together with the above-mentioned Benzy Birger, of the 4,000 martyrs of the three Jewish communities of Keidan, Shat and Zheim, only three Jews survived.

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Mass Murder *Keidan Yizkor Book, p 234*

Yehuda Ronder

Translated by Miriam Erez

On July 23 [1941] the Lithuanians killed 83 Jewish men and 12 Jewish women, together with 31 non-Jews, accusing the murdered of having been Communists and working for the Soviet Union.

The mass murder of the Jews of Keidan, together with Jews from nearby Shat [Šeta] and Zheim [Žeimiai] began on the afternoon of August 28, 1941. At the airfield, Soviet prisoners of war were forced to dig a huge mass grave one hundred meters in length, six meters wide, and two meters deep. The Jews were confined in a large warehouse 600 meters away. The guards divided them into groups of 20, and the first group of 20 men was led outside. Each group was driven to the pit by 30 armed murderers.
To avoid frightening those still in the warehouse and setting off a panic, a tractor's motor was left running by the warehouse. But the Jews heard the shouts and shots, and some decided to resist. Two of them, Chaim Ronder and a Polish Jew named Smolsky, hid in the warehouse and escaped after nightfall. They later became partisans and fought until the liberation.

The first group included the young rabbi Aaron Galin, a son-in-law of Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber, president of the Lithuanian Rabbinical Council. Beside the pit, Galin addressed the Jews with these words: "Severe suffering has been the lot of our people, [but] we will not be wiped out."

Many of the Jews refused orders to disrobe, and were murdered clothed. Baruch Meir Chesler, a locksmith, suddenly grabbed an automatic rifle out of the hands of one of the murderers, intending to shoot at him, but didn't know how to use the weapon. Then he and two youngsters tried to run away, but were brought down by a hail of bullets. Another hero, whose name we don't know, grabbed a weapon from the murderer Pranas Garšva and wounded him severely in the leg. Another anonymous hero stabbed Juozas Berankis in the neck with a pocketknife, as Berankis testified in court when he was tried in 1964.
Tzadok Shlapobersky died a hero's death: He attacked the murderer Aleksas Čižas with his bare hands, bit him, threw him to the ground, seized a pistol from his hand and shot him dead. Then Tzadok, Yudel Steinbach, Avraham Podlas and others dragged the terrified commander, a murderer named Mekeke, to the pit, where Tzadok bit him. Those murderers who jumped into the pit to save their bleeding commander killed the heroes with the butts of their rifles.

At murderer Čižas' funeral ceremony, speeches were made blaming the Jews. Čižas was declared a victim of Jewish terror, and on his tombstone was written: "Fell in the line of duty."

Thus did the Jewish heroes of Keidan meet their deaths.

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Ghetto, Resistance, and the Destruction of Keidan's Jews

Yehuda Ronder (Kovno) *Keidan Yizkor Book p 235-236*

Translated by Miriam Erez

Immediately after Hitler's forces entered Keidan in June 1941, math teacher Nissan Zaltzburg hung himself. Meir Berger was brutally beaten in the street and died in the hospital.
On July 23, 125 people — 95 of them Jews (83 men and 12 women) — were taken to the Babian (Borer) woods and shot to death. Among the murdered were Gutman Blumberg, Feivel Levin, Avraham Dinershul, Benjamin Ronder, Gavriel Polonez, Tevel Yaffe and his son Meir-Isaac, Moshe Zalmanovich and his daughter, David Prusak and his daughter, Y. Shapira, Birger, M. Zamsky and Shmuel Berger.

Among the murderers were officer Vladas Gylys (tried in 1964), drivers Juozas Davidonis, Vladas Silvestravichius, Reila and Kailevičius (who now lives in West Lorne, Ontario, Canada).

Mayor Povilius transferred all the Jews into a ghetto on Smilga Street, where they stayed from August 13, 1941, along with Jews from Shat (Šeta) and Zheim (Žeimiai). The fascists appointed a committee to administer the ghetto, which had no rights whatsoever. The committee included Tzadok Shlapobersky, Chaim Blumberg, Chaim Ronder, Avraham Kagan, and Shalom Chayat. While a heavy tax was imposed on the ghetto, it was not collected in full.

The murderers Pešegodskis, Stasys Morkūnas and Batura would beat the ghetto inhabitants with nail-studded clubs.

On August 16, the Jews were driven from the synagogue yard to the airfield beside the Smilga river. On the way from the ghetto, Reuven Chesler attempted to run away, but he was shot dead. Benzion Berger managed to escape. The attorney Abramovich was stripped, covered with tar and feathers and forced to run to the warehouse at the airfield. The crippled David Ronder and the elderly Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber were taken in the manure cart.

The Jews were confined to the warehouse for 12 days in dreadfully unsanitary conditions. Hirsch Lebiotkin hung himself there.

On the morning of August 28, the Jews were led in groups from the warehouse to the execution place. Men were taken first. Chaim Ronder and a Jew from Poznan, Poland, named Smolsky, hid in the warehouse. They escaped at night, and later fought the fascists with weapons in their hands.

On the way to the large pit that had been dug, and after they arrived there, the Jews began to resist. Many refused to disrobe, and they were murdered in the pit with their clothes on. Curses were heard.

Baruch Meir Chesler, while on the edge of the grave, grabbed a weapon from one of the murderers standing nearby and tried to shoot him, but didn't know how. He and two other young men broke away and ran towards the river. Stasys Rackevičius chased them and shot them dead. Their bodies were dragged to the pit and thrown in.
Another Jew (his name remained unknown), upon seeing the bodies of the murdered in the pit, quickly turned, grabbed the rifle of another murderer, Pranas Garšva, and shot him in the leg. Another unnamed Jew wounded the murderer Juozas Berankis (tried in 1964) in the neck with a pocketknife.

Tzadok Shlapobersky called upon the Jews to resist. He was the first to attack the murderer Aleksas Čižas, bit him in the throat, threw him to the ground, seized his pistol and shot him in the back. Čižas died a few hours later. Others dragged the German commander Mekeke to the pit and began to scratch and choke him. This group included Yehuda Steinbach, Avraham Podlas and others. In order to rescue the commander, another murderer, Jankunas (now living abroad) jumped into the pit. That day about 2,500 Jews were murdered.

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The Road of Suffering *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 237-240*

Rachel Shlapobersky-Ratner, Kiryat Chaim

Based on testimony from Yad VaShem, IX - 2939 / 252. Translated by Miriam Erez

I was born in Keidan in December 1912. My father, Yudel Shlapobersky, owned a flour mill. My mother was Chasya Rivka Shlapobersky, neè Avramsky. We were 11 children in the house. My eldest brother was Doctor of Law Shmuel Shlapobersky. He came to Kovno from St. Petersburg, where he owned a soap factory in partnership with Haim Arlozorov's father. From there he immigrated to Eretz-Israel and settled in Petach Tikva. He belonged to the General Zionists faction. For some time he wrote for the *Yiddishe Shtime* in Kovno along with Reuven Rubinstein, the editor. He passed away in Petach Tikva in 1949.

My next brother, Herschel (Harry) Shlapobersky, settled in Johannesburg and represented a petroleum company. My third brother, Motl (Max), resided in Riga, where he managed a soap factory. When the Germans invaded, he was summoned to the factory, ordered to turn around, and shot. I heard this from someone who arrived in the Kovno ghetto from Riga.

My fourth brother, Eliyahu, was killed in the Kovno ghetto. He was married to Feige Faivelzon, daughter of the rabbi of Kupishok (Kupiškis). When their daughter was one year old, I took her out of the Kovno ghetto to stay with a Lithuanian member of the German police, whose wife had once been our neighbor. This Lithuanian had a farm in the village, and they kept the girl along with their own children. After the Germans retreated, this family went to Germany and left the girl with her nanny, a village woman who took care of her until she turned four. My brother had given them the girl's birth certificate, which bore her parents' exact names, and asked that in the event that none of the family survived the war, the girl should be sent to South Africa.

After the war, a Jewish childrens' rescue organization took her to the orphanage in Ponevezh (Panevėžys), run by the "Brides of Jesus" nuns. In 1945, when I was liberated from a German concentration camp, I learned there were two Jewish children in the Ponevezh orphanage, one of whom was named Shlapobersky. I went there and found my brother's daughter. At first the convent director didn't want to release her into my custody, but he eventually relented. I brought the girl to Kovno, where I placed her in an orphanage, since I worked full time. She finished kindergarten in Kovno. After that I moved to Vilna, where she finished high school. In 1959, we left for Poland, where for two years she studied at the Politechnika University in Wrocław. When we immigrated to Israel in 1960, she was accepted at the Technion in Haifa, where she earned a degree. She now works as a construction engineer and is married with a daughter of her own.

I had another brother, Isser, who died of typhus before the war. My last brother was Tzadok, an officer in the Fourth Brigade of the Lithuanian army, and also a fire brigade commander. He was young and strong.

In 1941 the Germans rounded up Keidan's Jews and took them for execution. Tzadok, who had been on good terms with all the Lithuanians, asked Dr. Kasionis, the gynecologist, "Where are they taking us?" The latter lied to him, saying they were to be transferred to the occupied territories. They were actually taken to Count Totleben's estate, where they were confined in warehouses next to the palace. Later they all were taken to a field near the Jewish cemetery and lined up. Then the shooting began.

When my brother saw them beginning to shoot, he said to the commander, a German officer, "I have two children, aged 4 and 9. Shoot me, but at least leave them alive!" When the officer refused, Tzadok jumped on the German and began beating him. Both men fell into the pit, where my brother started choking the German officer. A Lithuanian policeman, Raudonis, saw the incident. Raudonis's brother ran a hotel in Keidan, in a house he had taken from its Jewish owners. Raudonis attacked my brother, but Tzadok seized him and slashed Raudonis's throat with his teeth. The other murderers then stripped my brother and stabbed him until he was nothing but a lump of flesh, which was thrown into the pit.

Tzadok's wife, Dora Shlapobersky, neè Shlonsky, upon seeing all this, went crazy. She covered her two children up with a scarf and jumped with them while alive into the pit. This

was on August 28, 1941. The following day, a funeral was held for Raudonis at the Lithuanian cemetery. A bottle was placed in his grave, with a letter saying, "here lies a man killed by the Jewish murderer Tzadok Shlapobersky." The engraving on his tombstone read, "Here lies the last victim of the Jewish murderers." I first heard this from a Lithuanian officer in the Shants quarter of Kovno, where we were sent from the ghetto to work.

In 1945, when I returned from the camp, I went to Keidan and found not a single Jew there. A Lithuanian woman, a notary named Gražiene, told me details of my brother's tragic death. Also the fire brigade guard, who had worked with my brother, told me the story.

My elder sister Anna was killed in Keidan along with Tzadok. My second sister Dina was with me in the Kovno ghetto. Her husband, Shapiro, was a teacher in the Hebrew high school and later worked as an economist at the Zefir tobacco factory in Kovno. He was killed at the Seventh Fort, together with his 16-year-old son and my husband, Shlomo Levin.

I had another sister, Rosa, who was married to Dr. Berelovitz in Koenigsberg [now Kaliningrad]. When the hitlerists came to power, they arrested him, and my sister took it hard. She left for Rhodesia, where she died of a nervous breakdown at the age of 46. I had another sister in Chicago, Zlata, who was married to a lawyer. She died at a young age following eye surgery.

As I said, I was married to Shlomo Levin, a bookkeeper at Wolf-Engelman. In 1941, when the war broke out, my sister Dina came to me and we hid in the Zefir factory basement where my brother-in-law worked. After a short while, Lithuanians and Germans broke in and said, "The Great Synagogue is just across the street. Germans were shot at from this direction, and you were shooting too. You have to come with us to the Gestapo." My brother-in-law and other Jews who worked at the factory told them: "But we have no weapons. Search us." They searched and said no problem, everything's in order. Then another Lithuanian came in and asked, "Why was I imprisoned in the Seventh Fort during the Bolshevik days? Now all of you are going to prison!"

We were hauled into the Gestapo and lined up against a wall. They wanted to shoot us, but then ordered us to turn around, and we were led to the Yellow Prison, the worst lockup in Kovno, intended for criminals. We were incarcerated there for 14 days. We had to hand over all our valuables and jewelry. We were given only water and a slice of black bread. Horrific things happened there. The Germans would come in and stomp on us. My sister saw how our husbands were taken out to work. Through the windows we saw rabbis forced to collect horse manure.

From there we were taken to the Seventh Fort, where the situation was extreme. The room in which the women were confined was full of feces and urine. We were forced to lie on the floor. Every night the women were taken out of the room and raped.

I asked one of the Lithuanians permission to go where the men were being confined, as my husband and brother-in-law were among them. He let me, and it was then that I saw an awful sight: All the men were lined up in rows in a field, their hair uncut and their eyes terrified. I saw my 16-year-old nephew, who asked me, "Why doesn't my mother send me food? I'm hungry. They don't give us anything to eat. My father and your husband are already gone." And so they shot them all, one after the other.

One night at two in the morning, some young Lithuanians came. They wanted to shoot us, the last 200 surviving women, as all the women who had been taken out and raped had been immediately shot afterwards. It was July, a clear night. Suddenly a German came in and said to them, "What are you doing? Orders are to shoot the elderly women only! The young ones should be put to work." We were ordered back into the prison. The following morning the remaining men were killed. The women were taken to the Ninth Fort, where the situation was also horrifying: Jews were dying of starvation and of infections caused by filth. People were ordered to lie on wooden planks across which big white lice paraded. The food was served out of trash barrels that stank of feces. We were given a bit of burnt millet and bread.

I and a few other women tied scarves on our heads, sneaked from the hill and went into town. My sister cried, "Why didn't you bring my child with you?" I told her that I'd begged the

Lithuanian to release her son, but he'd told me "No, he's a member of the *Komsomol*," and he was killed with the rest of the men.

We went to my apartment, where we found only four bare walls. I was told that the gentile girls from Cafè Aldona, which was downstairs, had taken all our valuables. We went back to the ghetto, which was still open at that time; it was locked down on September 1, 1941.

We went to work. Every day at 6 am we'd have to stand for inspection. We dug at the airport from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening. I met a Lithuanian named Nariskas, who told me that he himself had murdered all the Jews at the Seventh Fort.

In 1943, my sister was taken to Klooga [concentration camp] in Estonia. She had gone out from the basement where we were hiding, and a German called to her, "Sarah, come here!" And she was taken away. In Estonia she worked at the laundry, her friends told me afterwards. Later she became ill with a kidney disease, then they poured fuel on her and set her on fire.

In December 1943, I was transferred to a camp in Keidan, where we worked in a field until summer 1944. In July 1944 we were taken to Stutthof, an awful camp fenced by electric barbed wire that killed anyone who touched it. From the very beginning the women were separated from the men. We were stripped naked and taken into a bath. A doctor examined each of us gynecologically to be sure we weren't hiding jewelry or other valuables. Following the "bath," we were given dirty rags to wear, stained by the blood of the murdered. We looked like madwomen: Large women were given clothes that were too small, and short women were given items that were too large. Then we were put into barracks, where our supervisors were Polish women who beat us ruthlessly during inspections.

After a month, we underwent selection — "to the left" or "to the right" — and were sent to work. We had to walk a very long time, then we boarded a coal ship. There were about 300 women. We were taken to some village in Poland, where tents had been pitched for us with straw inside. There were 6 such tents, 50 women in each one. SS men wearing black uniforms with skulls guarded us. In the summer we worked at digging, and in the winter we cleared the snow.

When the Russians advanced and the Germans began to retreat, they took the healthy women with them. My hands and feet were frozen. The Germans chose 100 women whose condition was like mine, i.e., who couldn't continue walking, and left us behind. They took us into a grove, lined us up in rows and began shooting at us. I was in the back row. I saw the women from the front rows already lying on the ground, dead. I noticed then that a few women had started to run away, so I did too. We ran into the forest, and the two Germans that had been shooting began chasing us, but they didn't manage to hit us.

We escaped into the house of a Polish farmer and asked for help, as the Germans were already retreating, and the Russians were expected to arrive any minute. We were 12 women left from the entire camp. The gentile woman told us to go to the local priest, who had a cowshed where we could hide. We made it there and lay on the ground alongside the cows, horses, and pigs. The next morning the farmers came and brought us food. So it went for five days. On March 10, 1945, the Russians entered and liberated us.

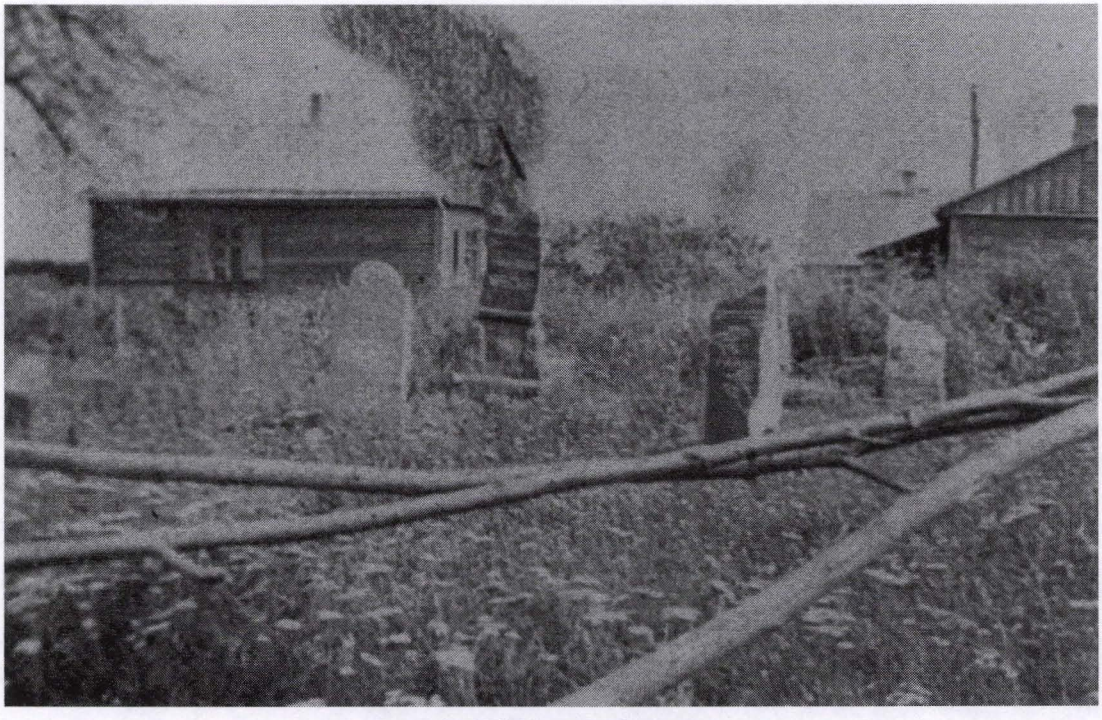
A car was going from there to Grodno, and the driver asked if any of us wanted to come with him. I said I'd go. My legs were frozen and wrapped in rags. A few other women came with us, and we arrived at a checkpoint in Grodno. The Russians treated us not as tortured women from the camps, but with suspicion, as if we were criminals. We were ordered to lie on the ground, and were given bread and American canned food.

From Grodno we went to Vilna, and from there to Keidan. As I've already said, on reaching Kovno I met an acquaintance, whose sister was my friend. He worked in the Food Production Ministry, where I got a job as a cashier. Later I retrieved my niece from a convent in Ponevezh, and we lived together. In 1948, I married my current husband, an engineer, Yirmiyahu Ratner, from Vilna. We moved to Vilna, where I worked as a bookkeeper in a large department store. In March 1959, we moved from Vilna to Walbrzych, Poland. In 1960, we immigrated to Israel.

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Remains of the Keidan Jewish cemetery after the Second World War



Remains of the Jewish cemetery



The place where our loved ones were massacred, after the liberation from the Nazis



The first Commemoration Day

Mass Graves *Keidan Yizkor Book p 241-242*

Chaya Gel, Jerusalem

Translated by Chaim Charutz

I was born in Keidan, where I lived in 16 Gedimino Street. When the Russians conquered Lithuania the first time in 1940, they nationalized our business and seized our house. I went to live with my sister in Kovno and started working. I tried not to attract attention, as in Keidan I had been "bourgeois."

When the Russians left Lithuania and the Germans entered, part of Slobodka was fenced off and the Kovno ghetto was established there. Before the ghetto was locked on August 15 1941, I moved with my sister and her two children to the ghetto. After the ghetto gates were locked, an announcement was published regarding forced labor.

I went to work every day at the airport. However, one day, instead of returning us after work to the ghetto, they took us to the Keidan camp under heavy guard. We were herded together like cattle into a building that had previously held the officers' club. The building was entirely fenced in with electrified barbed wire. Anyone who to escape was immediately electrocuted. Our bedroom had triple-tiered bunks, with two women on each bunk.

The place was incredibly filthy. Lice multiplied because of the filth, and these tortured us to the point of madness. During the daylight hours, we were forced to work. The work consisted of digging ditches to a depth of three meters, for the purpose of laying electric cables.

When I was brought to the Keidan camp, there were no other Jews in the town. Only two men survived – Chaim Ronder and Ben-Zion Birger from Janushova (Janušava.).

While I was in the Keidan camp, I frequently asked the work manager to give me quota work. When I finished the work as quickly as possible, the manager used to free me for a few hours, provided I brought him two fresh eggs to eat. During these few hours, I used to meet Christian acquaintances, with whom we previously had close, friendly relations. From them, I managed to learn what had really happened.

Here is what I was told:

Right away in the beginning, all Jews were concentrated in the synagogue yard, which was designated as the ghetto. Later all the men were separated and locked in Zhirgynas. This was the building near Count Totleben's garden with large horse stables. The men were forced to do the most difficult work under inhuman conditions. In addition, they were also frequently abused. I wish to tell here of one terrible example:

My elder brother, Hershel Gel, was forced to clean the latrines with his bare hands. Afterwards, he was not allowed to wash his hands and was forced to eat with dirty hands.

After a short time, during which they were forced to do extremely hard work and were subjected to heavy physical abuse, the men were brought to an open field on the way to the town of Ariogola, and were forced to dig very deep pits. Everyone was brought there – old people, sick people, women and children. They were all forced to undress, and to run under a hail of bullets towards the pits. All the while they were fired at, and they fell into the pits. Many were still alive when the pits were covered. The screams of horror and suffereing were so strong and so terrible that they even reached distant villages.

When all the Jews had been brought to the place and the action had not yet started, the young rabbi of Keidan, Aaron Galin, the son-in-law of Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber, requested to be allowed to say a few words before his death.

Above the gathered Jews stood Lithuanians, all with rifles in their hands, ready to fire. And here are the names of these distinguished people of Keidan: the commandant of Keidan and his secretary; the magistrate Klibas and his secretary; the principal of the Keidan Lithuanian gymnasium with all the teachers, without exception; the doctor of Keidan's regional hospital Arzhamsky, Dr. Savitsky, the pharmacist Stančius; the town mayor, Povylius, the

investigating judge, the lawyer Shafranchik; and many other Shaulists.

The young rabbi started speaking to all of them. He spoke fluent Lithuanian. He especially addressed the principal and all the teachers with these words:

"You were appointed to spread culture and education. In your hands, we placed the cream of the region's youth. You were like parents to these children. How then can a father, without mercy, without conscience, raise a hand against his innocent children and murder them?"

Turning his eyes to heaven, he said: "God in heaven will never forgive you for the terrible crime you commit today! Will humanity ever forgive you for this sin? The Lithuanian nation will never be cleansed from the stain that will fall on you."

He finished with the words: "Our innocent spilled blood will avenge you..." When his last words ended, Tzadok Shlapobersky went out of the line, and Yechiel Steinbach followed him. Tzadok sprang quickly towards the commandant, and grabbed his throat to strangle him. At the same moment, Shaulists jumped on him from behind and murdered him. As a punishment, they buried his wife and two children alive. After this, the action started.

The holy places in Keidan were desecrated. The tombstones in the cemetery were shattered. Pigs were housed in the *Tiferet Bachurim* prayer house. The great synagogue was turned into a storehouse.

Before I left Lithuania, I went to say farewell at the graves. The ground was ploughed and sown, as if nothing had ever happened there. However, in my presence, elderly Christians who were passing by stopped, stood for a moment and bowed before the graves.

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Roads of Suffering and Struggle
דרך ייסורים ומאבק

In the Russian Exile *Keidan Yizkor book pp 243-251*

Bella Adler, Basel (Switzerland)

Translated by Bella Golubchik

I was born and raised in Keidan. Our Jewish life was very well developed. We had Tarbut and progymnasium Hebrew schools. Most young people were Zionists. We had *Hashomer Hatzair, Beitar* and other organizations. We had several houses of religious study, a large synagogue, the *kloyz*. The town rabbi, Reb Shlomo Feinsilber, was the president of the Rabbinic Association of Lithuania.

Among the important Jews in the town were Zundel Ginzburg, Yisraelov, Shalom Khayat, Abrasha Cohen (or Kagan) and others. These communal activists were the first to die.

We had a Jewish primary school and, as I have already mentioned, most of the youth were Zionists, and many pioneers made *aliya* before the war. Many of these live in kibbutz Beit Zera today.

My father was a professional gardener. I studied in the Lithuanian gymnasium in Keidan, and after graduation I continued my studies in Kovno, in the Faculty of Humanities. After receiving a university degree I immediately began teaching at the Jewish high school in Kovno, where the language of instruction was Lithuanian. I taught literature, history and Lithuanian. When the Soviets entered Lithuania in 1940 they closed down all the Hebrew schools. Only the "Sholem Aleichem" Yiddish high school remained and I obtained a job teaching there.

In the summer of 1940 I married Leo Adler, who was studying in the Mir *yeshiva* and who was my brother's teacher. My husband left Kovno on December 4. He had been born in Nuremberg, and as a German citizen holding a German passport, he received a Japanese visa to Curaçao. I could have joined him but as I was a teacher, I didn't want to leave my class in the middle of a school year. So he waited for me in Japan. In the interim, I learned that I was pregnant. My husband wrote that I should come as soon as possible; meanwhile the situation grew more strained, and it was no longer easy to get out of Lithuania. I received a visa to go to America, and an assurance from the Japanese consul that there was a visa awaiting me in Moscow. I had only to get out. I used all my contacts, legitimate and otherwise, and eventually I received an exit permit. I left Lithuania on May 5 or 6, 1941.

I reached Moscow and immediately tried to obtain a Japanese visa. But I was summoned by the N.K.V.D., on the pretext that they still had to write something else in my passport. It was a serious mistake on my part to hand over the passport. When I came to retrieve it, the N.K.V.D. officer told me it had expired on May 1 and that it needed to be extended. He advised me to approach the German consul. I did so, and the consul was actually amenable to extending the passport. However, there was with him a short little German with blazing black eyes, who said it was not possible. I ran around for several days, in vain.

One day I felt unwell, and had to remain in bed in my hotel, called the Moscow. At midnight I phoned a relative who lived in the capital. She immediately took me to the hospital. My eldest son, Mordechai-Kalman, was born on May 21. I must say that the maternity hospital treated me very well. I returned to the hotel with the baby and a note from the doctor saying I should not be moved, because they wanted to repatriate me to Lithuania.

On Sunday June 22, war broke out between Germany and Russia. I saw that my fate had been decided. I ran to the German consulate carrying my baby, but they were already

packing their possessions there. That same night the bombing began, and I was transferred to a second hotel, the Metropole.

One afternoon a man in a black overcoat entered my room, and said very politely, " You hold a German passport, and the situation is such that it is dangerous for you to stay here. We will transfer you somewhere you will feel safe." I said to him, "You want to imprison me?" He answered, "Why should you think this? Take everything, leave nothing behind".

I packed everything I possessed and was transported, carrying my child, to a camp of wooden barracks on the back side of Butyrka, the famous Moscow jail. There we were surrounded by a barbed wire fence. We spent a few weeks in this camp. The attitude of the Russians in the camp towards us was good, but the attitude of the camp detainees was dreadful. These were people of German extraction, who never knew even a word of German but were receiving funds from their consulate. These were people of a very low level, the underworld in fact. They were actually Russians, but were considered German citizens because they held German passports. There was in the camp a kind of old-age home of former French nurses who had grown old in Russia but still retained French passports. These were the most tragic characters. Altogether we numbered about 400.

We all were transferred to the train station. Germans from South American countries, who were in transit in Russia hoping to return to Germany, were transferred there via Turkey. I pleaded to be allowed to exit to Turkey, too. I hoped to reach Eretz Israel this way, but my request was denied. I was returned to the camp. From there we were taken again to the train cars and transported from Moscow to Gorky. We were transferred to a defunct monastery near Gorky. There to my great joy I met many Jews from the camp for the first time. During the journey we were fed herring, water and 300 grams of bread. We travelled in cattle cars under armed guard.

This was at the beginning of August, 1941. I remember I still wore a pink blouse and blue skirt that I had brought from Kovno. I had lost all my hairpins and my two plaits hung down my back, and in my arms I carried the baby and all my possessions. A fair-haired man, who I thought was a German, offered to carry my case. I grabbed it out of his hand and said I didn't need help from a German. He swore that he was a Jew from Czechoslovakia . His wife had remained behind at the train station in Tshernovits (Chernivtsi, now in Ukraine). I met other Jews like him there, who were arrested in Tshernovits and were to be transferred to Russia. There had not been enough train cars, so they took the men and left the women behind.

We remained in this camp until November 1941. There were about 1,000 of us. We slept on narrow beds. There were also bunks. We were fed soup twice a day. In the morning a cup of tea, without sugar, 400 grams of bread and a piece of fish; at noon, a few spoons of porridge but without any oil. This menu was repeated day after day.

The baby was with me all the time. In November we were put into cattle cars again and taken from that place. To protect my child from the cold I wrapped him in a silver-fox stole and an angora shawl. The others thought I was insane for wrapping the child in such expensive items. We arrived with this caravan to Aktyubinsk (Aktobe), in central Asia. It was midwinter, during the siege of Moscow. We lived in little huts that resembled cowsheds. My situation was very difficult because of the child. I didn't have diapers for him. I exchanged my most precious possessions for sugar. I still had a little bit of money, which I used to buy milk that the village women brought to the headquarters. Apart from my child, there were also a few sick and elderly people who received milk.

In Aktyubinsk we were kept isolated behind barbed wire all the time. We were not free for one minute. We stayed there until May 1942. Most of the Jews there were refugees from Romania, Hungary, Bessarabia and Czechoslovakia. They were all suspicious of each other and I was considered a total alien. They used me to write all sorts of requests and letters, because I knew both Russian and German. We even met people from Estonia in this camp. Among them were also Viennese citizens and Germans who escaped from Estonia.

In May 1942, after long preparations, we were sent to Karaganda (in Kazakhstan). This journey lasted six weeks. We were put in prefabricated barracks that had previously housed prisoners of war. Conditions there were frightful. The heat was awful. People were weakened from the journey, and terrible filth and bedbugs predominated. Nothing was disinfected: They merely threw our clothes into special ovens, where the clothes were destroyed but the lice survived.

The food was awful, and the only solace was that outside the camp it was even worse. They took people out to work, but it was too difficult for them because they were so weak. Work was obligatory, but they never beat or abused anyone. The only punishment for disobedience was an isolation cell. There were more than 1,000 Jews in this camp. Apart from them were Polish people from around Gdynia, who declared themselves *Volksdeutsche*, German nationals. There were also Russians who lacked Soviet passports, Romanians, Hungarians, Yugoslavs and Germans who came from Teheran.

We would receive 400 grams of bread every day. In the morning there was soup made of green cabbage leaves without any oil and a spoon of porridge; noon and evening the same soup. I was breastfeeding the baby all this time, and because they assigned him a normal ration I actually received a double portion. From time to time they also gave a little sugar. I never had any clothes or diapers for my child, and tried to acquire them in exchange for slices of bread.

Infections and sickness spread as a result of the filth and other conditions in the camp. It was difficult to get to a doctor. By the time I reached one I was already in an advanced state of typhus. At the end of July or the beginning of August, I was taken to what they called a hospital. This was a building made of planks without a floor. The doctor in the hospital, Markovsky, was the son of a rabbi from Odessa. There was also another doctor there, a prisoner of war from Vienna. I spent about half a year in the hospital together with my baby. I left there after the battle of Stalingrad.

The food in the hospital was no better than in the camp. Actually they allocated the hospital better food, but the staff took it for themselves. My baby became infected and was sick all the time. I don't know how he survived. When I left the hospital I was so weak that I didn't have the strength to walk to fetch food. There was an old Russian princess in the bed next to mine, and she would bring me my soup.

One night my child burst out crying and I couldn't calm him. There were about 300 women in that barrack and they all started shouting at him to be quiet as they couldn't sleep and had to work the next day. But I couldn't quiet him. At the same time a doctor and a group of Russian officers entered the barrack for their usual inspection. They asked why I didn't take the child to the doctor. I said it was difficult to get to him. They ordered me to take him to the doctor the next day.

The following morning a nurse, who was also a prisoner, came and told me they were waiting for me in the hospital. She wrapped the child and took him to Dr. Vinter, from Vienna. He established my son had diphtheria and needed a serum immediately. He even dispatched a nurse to Karaganda to fetch it, because our camp was not actually in Karaganda, but in Spassk, 40 kilometres away. A dreadful storm was raging outside. Nevertheless the nurse (who was Russian) left in a sleigh and returned with the serum that same evening. Thanks to this my child was saved.

As time passed, the situation in our camp improved a little. I was approached to organize a school, because I was the only qualified teacher there, despite the fact that there were other educated people with experience who could serve as teachers. With the help of two other women, a Mrs. Meyer, a convert of Jewish origin, and a Mrs. Hofschmidt, I established a school. Understandably, the school was under the supervision of the local *politruk*, or political officer. By the end there were 99 children of varying ages in the school. We had no teaching necessities, no books, no notebooks, no paper. We had to cut every pencil into three or four

pieces. The children wrote on wooden boards, and after we corrected them we erased the writing with a glass shard.

We also had a kindergarten, because in the later period children were born in the camp. When the authorities asked what I wanted in exchange for running the school, I requested permission to lodge away from the barrack, where the conditions and the people were dreadful. I was given permission to lodge in the staff room. I brought a bed there and stayed there together with my son. My living conditions improved but the food never changed.

The school pupils were of course the offspring of prisoners – German Jews and non-Jews, Russians holding German passports and people without any citizenship, and also Gypsies.

I recall an argument with the *politruk*. I said it was impossible to promote one of the pupils to a higher class. His name was Anatoly Batsko and he was backward. The officer shouted, "In his family not one person is literate, and he can already sign his name, so you have to make him an outstanding student."

In camp, concern grew about the health conditions. Suddenly a large quantity of foodstuff arrived from America. We received rice bread, jam, and butter. When people had revived a bit they were sent out to do hard labor. They sent me out to work with children in the summer months.

We tried to celebrate the Jewish festivals, even under camp conditions. I exchanged bread for a menorah from some German Jews and we lit Chanukah candles. There was a Dr. Volgemut with us in the camp. He was the son of the principal of the rabbinic seminar in Breslau and the editor of "*Yeshurun*." He taught us the Bible. During the last Passover we refused to eat bread, but asked for flour and baked our own *matzo*. We also organized a Passover *seder,* which was dangerous and could have landed us in the isolation cell. The *seder* took place in my room at the school after we had covered the windows with blankets. I was most in danger as I was responsible for the school. All Jews who wanted to celebrate assembled with me. We recited the *Haggadah* and even had horseradish for bitter herbs. We stole some beetroot from the field and prepared some red coloured water to serve as wine. We also managed to get a few potatoes. We recited the entire *Haggadah*. But we had to leave the *kneidlakh* for another time.

We also prayed in the school on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We had one or two prayer books in our possession. We prayed despite the great danger that the *politruk* would discover us. I will never forget how Dr. Volgemut stood, praying the whole day of Yom Kippur. We stood and trembled lest the *politruk* should surprise us. At the end of Yom Kippur, Dr Volgemut said to me, "Because you helped us observe Yom Kippur as Jews, God will help you deliver the boy to his father." At that time this prophecy seemed a pure fantasy to me, because I didn't know where my husband was, or even if he was still alive.

The *politruk* would bring us news about the war, and our mood gradually improved. I organized performances with the school children. The day the war ended I rose from my bed, where I had been sick with malaria. This was May 9, 1945. We thought a new world had been born. All the prisoners gathered together and a table was set up outside. We all wept with joy, the Russians and the prisoners together. That was the first time I spoke in public in the camp. Holding my child in my arms, I said that mothers who had sacrificed their sons for the sake of liberation must not be forgotten.

In the camp we began to hope that the end of our suffering was near, and each day we looked forward to our release. But our liberation was not so swift in coming. We remained in the camp a year and a half after the war ended, until we had lost all patience and hope. Parcels arrived from abroad, but life in the camp continued as before, with hard labor, requests for extra soup and extra bread for those who worked longer hours.

One day toward the end of 1946, all the men were assembled in the headquarters. They were told that train cars were being prepared for our release. It soon became clear that the men were to be sent to the coal mines, while women were going to be sent to collective farms. The women raised an enormous protest, but the commandant said he had no power to help, as the order had come from Moscow. Yet later, on his own, he sent only the men who were without wives to the coal mines. The others he transferred to a prisoner of war camp. The camp seethed with rage. There were threats of a hunger strike. I didn't have anyone else in the camp except my son, who by then was five years old. The women approached me and asked me to write a petition to the authorities, saying there were no men healthy enough to survive more than half a year in the coal mines, where, weak and exhausted, they would surely contract consumption.

I knew that writing a request like this in someone else's name was like putting my head into the lion's jaws. We knew that in Russia it was forbidden for anyone to make a request on another's behalf. But I told myself at that moment I could not sit by with folded arms, so I wrote. From the heart I described our whole situation, even adding some legal reasons why we should not be responsible for Russia's reconstruction, as our people had been annihilated and were not responsible for what the fascists had done, we were merely victims. We sent the request and awaited a reply.

One rainy autumn day, the commandant arrived. The women fell on him from all sides. I stood next to him dressed in a shawl and a coat, and he didn't recognize me. He said: "I have received a request from your school teacher. An excellent request. I will dispatch it immediately to Alma-Ata, and I am sure we will receive a reply. You must only be patient and not do anything stupid.

Two days later the *politruk* announced that a committee was coming from Moscow the next day to examine all the detention and prisoner-of-war camps, and that he would try to bring them to our camp as well. He then added: "We have already given them the request from Mrs. Adler." I had signed the letter "an anti-fascist activist." A delegation was chosen to speak with the committee from Moscow, including Raudinger, who conducted the cultural activity in the camp (he now lives in Vienna), the engineer Polak and me. I was to be the main speaker.

We were given a signal when they arrived and went to meet them. There were three or four generals, large as bears. One was lean, handsome and nicely attired: He looked like an English diplomat but with a Jewish face. They turned to me: "And so, what do you have to tell us? Did you write that request?" They complimented me and asked where I had learned such fine Russian. I showed my papers and they understood that I was a university graduate. They said that if I wished they would give me a university lectureship, and if not I could go home.

I saw their strategy, to divert the conversation into a personal matter. I said, "I haven't come here to talk about myself. My personal affairs are not important at this moment I want you to liberate all these people here in the camps." To which they replied, "You have already written this to us."

The conversation lasted three hours, and they actually "drank my blood." I trembled the entire time, afraid I would lose everything. This was not only for my own sake, but also for the 400 Jews in the coal mines who were under a virtual death sentence every day. They said to me: "For us there is no difference, Jew or non-Jew. If they hold German passports they are Germans." I replied, "I will prove to you that there is a difference between Jew and non-Jew." I don't know where I found the courage to raise my voice. One of the generals looked me in the eye and said, "If you can prove the difference to me, I will liberate you tomorrow." I answered, "Mister General, here we have Mahler (a German named Mahler passed by the window at that moment). This same Mahler would be sitting where you are today if the Germans had won the war, but you as a Jew would be in the next world. We have lost enough, so let us enjoy a little bit of the victory. Let the Jews who have managed to remain alive continue living. More than enough have walked into the gas ovens."

After he heard what I had to say, he said to me: "Mrs. Adler, you are quite a personality. Where is your husband?" Again I didn't allow him to get personal. He suggested everyone write down where they wanted to go and promised to help them get there. I asked him not to forget the people in the coal mines, since they had no one to speak up for them, and he said "good." After that they all shook my hand and left.

When I went out, I found women who had been listening at the headquarters windows to my discussions with the generals. They didn't believe me. They thought I would only make an effort on my own behalf and sell them out.

Dr. Vinter stood next to the headquarters in his white gown and awaited me. When I came out, I fell on the grass. Dr. Vinter grasped my hands, kissed them and said, "Mrs. Adler, I heard everything." Dr. Vinter still lives near me today. All the women calmed down. Now they treated me with great respect. I lay on the grass for about an hour without being able to move.

After a short while the camp was filled with clerks. They made a list of all the Jews and their desired destinations. The husbands who were in the prisoner-of-war camps were also returned. The next day some of the committee members reappeared in camp and came to the school. When they saw me, one began to laugh, saying, "So, have we kept our promise?" I replied, "I thank you very much, but the men haven't yet come back from the coal mines." He comforted me, saying "They too will arrive."

At night in the camp, we slept with open doors so the commandant could enter at any time. I lay in my room, in the school staff room, on a field bed. Suddenly the door opened and a man named Klinger, from Bukovina, entered. He roused me from my bed and led me outside. I asked what had happened and he said "Not I, but 300 men who have just returned kiss you and thank you." They arrived in the middle of the night. During their short stay there they became sick. This was in January, 1947. The repatriation of the camp inmates began in February. Each was sent to his requested destination.

Still, I remained in the camp among the last detainees, because I was a suspect. When I got out I was not actually liberated, even though I was the principal of a school. I left with a group sent to Kharkov and went from there to Odessa, where I spent six or seven months. I was among a few Jewish women whom the authorities couldn't decide whether to retain in Russia or allow to go abroad. They obviously wanted to convince me to remain. They promised me the world if I would agree to go to Kovno. I argued that I couldn't go to Kovno because I would find only graves there. I wanted to travel to Germany to my husband's birthplace, in hopes of finding him there. I knew my husband was in Japan but I didn't tell them this.

At the same time, some army officers came to my aid – Major Friedman, the superintendent of the hospital, Dr. Waksman and a Jewish doctor, Shmushkina. This occurred in Odessa. I wanted to get food for my son so I applied to become a maid at the headquarters, because it was outside the camp, and village women used to come and bring fruit.

This was a prisoner-of-war camp. There were Germans, Romanians, Hungarians and SS officers as well. We were all together. The attitude of the Russian commanders to me was excellent. It was frightfully hot in Odessa and my child almost suffocated. There were three other small children in the camp who all died. The commander, Waksman, allowed me to sleep outside the clinic, on the terrace. He said, "I am not afraid of you, but if your look could kill not even one prisoner would still be alive."

One day when I was washing the floors, Major Friedman called me inside and began speaking to me in Yiddish. He told me that the order had come that all Austrian prisoners of war had to return to Austria by September 1. I told him I was a German citizen and not an Austrian. But apparently they had decided to help me get out.

Two days later, a dark, ugly woman arrived in the camp. She sat in Dr. Waksman's room. I was summoned there and she put different questions to me and completed a questionnaire. I saw that she filled in, "Citizenship: Austrian." I said, "I will not sign that document because I am a German citizen." The woman looked at me and said, "Silly woman, can't you see they are trying to save you?" Eventually I signed the questionnaire. I was put among the Austrians and left with them. I didn't believe I was free until I reached Vienna. This happened at the beginning of October, 1947. We left Russia at the end of September, but we were delayed in a transit camp in Hungary. The prisoners of war cooked their own food there, but added so much paprika that it was impossible to swallow. This was a horrible feeling: You are hungry, there is food in front of you and you just can't eat it. They gave my son special food. They actually didn't know what to do with him. The prisoners of war had not seen a child for so many years.

In New York I met people who had been in the Russian camps, and when I told them that I had brought my son with me from the camp, they said I was a shameless liar. They said they knew no child came out of the camps alive. What did I do to keep my child alive? In Karaganda there was a Polish paramedic called Halek. He told me once he had heard that when blood is taken from an artery and injected into the muscles, it creates the vitamins that are lacking in the body. From that time I didn't let him rest. Every month he took blood from me and transfused it into my son. This he did all the time until I fell ill with malaria in 1945, when he was forced to stop. As soon as the injections stopped my son succumbed to tonsillar tuberculosis.

I met up with my husband in America in 1948. I received my first letter from him while I was still in the camp, and that is another special story. There was a Finnish girl named Elishka among my students, who had been liberated before us. At her mother's suggestion I gave her a letter to my cousin in America, whose address I remembered. This letter reached her from Finland. My cousin no longer lived at that address, but a neighbor passed the letter on to her. My relative, who believed I was no longer alive, travelled to New York with the letter. My husband's uncle lived there. This took place in 1945 or the beginning of 1946. Immediately the uncle telegraphed my husband, who was then in Shanghai.

One day I was called to headquarters, where they handed me a parcel that had been sent to me by Rabbi Mishkinsky of Tel Aviv. I obviously didn't know who Rabbi Mishkinsky was. After that I received additional parcels and also a letter from my husband.

When I arrived in Vienna, a few of my past pupils were already awaiting me. They immediately told my husband by telegram of my imminent arrival. After two months I left Vienna for America. Today I live in Basel, where my husband serves as a rabbi.

I would like to add an episode from life in the camp in Karaganda, when they tried to force a group of religious Jews to work on Yom Kippur. These were Hungarian youths who had been in the "death squads," those forced to clear landmines from the fields. They were taken prisoner by the Russians and sent to the detention camp. They asked not to have to work on Yom Kippur, saying they would work double shifts another day. Their request was refused, but one group of youths said they wouldn't go out to work. They were sent to the isolation cells, in a pit covered with planks. They were told, "The authorities will forget to feed you." They weren't even given the regular 300 grams of bread and the portion of water. After they had spent three or four days in the pit everyone began to worry about their fate. Suddenly Dr. Markovsky, leading the committee, arrived at the camp. I approached him and said, "Doctor, Jews are sitting in a pit because they observed Yom Kippur, you need to get them out of there." And he said "Leave me alone, let me be." But I wouldn't allow him any rest until he went to the pit. When he saw their condition, he ordered that they be set free immediately. They were returned to the camp half alive and half dead. They had been without even a slice of bread for five days. The group numbered five or six youths.

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In the Far North *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 252-254*

Menachem Klibansky

Translated by Bella Golubchik

I was born in Keidan, Lithuania. During the First World War, we were exiled to Russia and settled temporarily in the city of Tsaritsyn (later renamed Stalingrad). In 1921 we returned to our home at Number 5 Market Square, Keidan. My parents opened a small grocery store, which gave us our livelihood.

I began my studies in the *cheder* of Reb Meishe Khone Shamesh, of blessed memory. A few years later I went to Kovno to study in the yeshiva there. Because my parents' little grocery shop couldn't support a family of seven, we moved to Kovno in 1932, where my father, of blessed memory, was hired as secretary to the adult religious school in Slobodka.

I continued to learn in the yeshiva, but, tempted away by secular matters, I began to attend Zionist clubs and different youth organizations until I decided to join the Beitar movement in Kovno. I left the yeshiva and prepared to take the matriculation examination for university. My parents didn't have the means to send me to university, however, so I was forced to take a job. I worked as secretary of the Tel Chai fund.

I never forgot Keidan, and used to visit there often, and when I finished the Beitar officers' school in Krekenava, under the direction of Yirmiyahu Halpern, of blessed memory, I asked the governing body of Beitar to send me as an instructor to Keidan, where I prepared a group of platoon leaders.

In 1941 I was arrested by the Russian secret police and exiled to Siberia, together with my mother and young brother Gershon. Father fell ill at that time and remained in Kovno. When the Germans came he was interned in the Slobodka ghetto. In 1944, in the final *aktsion* against the children and the aged, he was taken by the Nazis to the Ninth Fort and never returned.

Until 1942 we were not far from the town of Biysk in the District of Altai, on a "*sovkhoz*" (state-owned farm). From there they sent me to work in the *taiga* forest for two months, about 200 kilometers from our sovkhoz. I labored there with some other men from Kovno and when I once organized a hike to another state farm, I met a woman from Keidan named Wolpert, with her two children, Eliezer and Frieda, (the latter of whom fell ill and died there soon after). I also met another woman from Keidan named Rachel Gutman, with her two daughters, Riva and Chana. Their husbands had been sent to a concentration camp for men and never saw their families again.

On our *sovkhoz* we were organized into work teams. The aged men and women did "light" work, while we men did hard and exhausting labor. We were eight young, strong men who were sent every day to work in the fields, eight kilometers away from the *sovkhoz*. We worked from six in the morning until ten at night, without sufficient food for such arduous labor. But even starvation didn't break our spirit. Every day we went to work singing Hebrew songs, and returned from work still singing. The local inhabitants of the farm immediately knew when we left and when we returned as they heard our songs from a distance. They liked the songs so much that their youth knew them by heart, and wherever you turned you could hear young gentiles singing "*Tel Chai...*"

I was shocked when I received my first wages: 40 roubles. Our family could subsist on this for only four days. I complained that it was impossible to live on such low wages, especially for such hard labor. The next day the farm's wall newspaper stated, "In the opinion of Klibansky, Soviet wages are insufficient."

I immediately requested an appointment with the local secretary of the Communist party and told her the whole story. She promised to come to our work place and would even work alongside us to understand our situation.

In fact she did arrive the next day, and worked with us for only one hour, because she didn't have the strength to work more at such a pace. She immediately called a general meeting of workers and supervisors. They brought us to the meeting in a large cart, together with her. Once the cart started moving we began singing our Hebrew songs, and she liked them so much that she clapped her hands, without knowing what we were singing about.

At the meeting she rebuked the supervisors because they were not recording the correct amount of work we were doing; this was the reason for our poor earnings. She also contended that she had never seen such workers in her life, and named us the "Stakhanovite brigade[136]". Our wages improved, as did the attitude toward us.

When Passover approached, my mother, of blessed memory, organized matzo baking. It was one of the most difficult things to do, considering the conditions under which we lived. First, there wasn't enough flour; second, there was nowhere to set up a facility, but no obstacles could deter her in fulfilling the commandment and observing religion and tradition. She overcame all difficulties, and every Jewish family in the *sovkhoz* had matzo for Passover.

We all lived in the club, a large, long hall, and there we organized the seder. After reciting the *Haggadah* and eating the *kneydlach,* we began singing and dancing. When we did the *hora* the enthusiasm was overwhelming, so much that one woman jumped on the table and began to dance, and everyone around clapped hands. The inhabitants of the farm, who were standing at the windows, caught our enthusiasm and began to participate in the song and dance, until it was impossible to differentiate who were the real revellers, they or we.

The seder left a mighty impression on our Jews, and everyone said they had never before participated in such a wonderful celebration.

In June 1942 they transferred us to the far north, to Bykov Mys, Bulun district, in the Yakutia Autonomous Republic. The Gadya family from Keidan was not far from us, a woman named Rosa, her son Yosef and her daughter Rachel. The son worked as a bookkeeper there. One day, he had to submit the annual balance sheet to the district administration. The only transport was by dog-drawn sleds. A mighty blizzard came up. Whenever this happened, the dogs stretched out on the snow and refused to move until the blizzard abated; they remained like that on the road for several days. The result was horrendous: Yosef's hands and feet froze and part of his face was frostbitten. He was taken to the capital, Yakutsk, by plane and operated on in the hospital. They amputated his hands, his nose and a few of his toes. He became disabled and unemployed, and lived with his sister in Vilna. His mother died a few years ago. He now lives in Israel.

Bykov Mys is a peninsula, bordered by the frozen Arctic Ocean on one side and the Lena River on the other. This river is 40 kilometres wide in places. The peninsula lies 2,000 kilometers from the North Pole. Darkness reigns there for three months in the year, when the sun doesn't show itself at all, and for three months there is no night. The sun disappears completely and it is impossible to distinguish between day and night. The Yakuts live there, a tribe similar to the Eskimos. Their main activity is fishing.

Each of us received 20 nets, each net 25 meters long; in exchange we had to give a certain quantity of the catch to the factory (where they were salted and sent on to the interior of the country.) There were usually fish in the nets in October when the fishing season began. After that, the nets remained almost empty, and because of this life became very difficult. There was hardly a slice of bread each day; hunger so depressed people's spirits that one of us committed suicide.

The Jewish community in Bykov Mys was cohesive and unified, including about fifty families. Due to the initiative of my mother, two charity funds were established, *Tzdaka Gdola* and *Gmilut Chassadim*. These were a great help to those families who, for various reasons such as sickness, couldn't participate in the fishing and thus had no livelihood. On Shabbat there

[136] Named for Aleksei Stakhanov, held up as a Soviet hero for his allegedly near-superhuman work effort.

was a prayer *minyan* in my mother's house and the same happened on holy days and festivals. In our first year in Bykov Mys we were officially and publicly given a holiday from work for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, due to the decency of the factory manager. I think this was the only place in the entire Soviet Union that such a thing happened.

Young people used to gather at my small apartment. We taught them to read Hebrew, the Bible and so on, and also those Hebrew songs that we remembered from our childhood. All this bore fruit. One must point out, that in contrast with other settlements in the Soviet Union, there was no hint of assimilation among us, and not even one case of intermarriage. Young people left this place after many years, strong in their Jewish national spirit. Most are now in Israel.

In 1956 I was able to return to Lithuania and settled in Vilna. It was here I began my struggle to get out of the diaspora and return to my homeland. The struggle lasted 13 years until eventually, on May 1, 1969, I made *aliya* to Israel.

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How Judaism Penetrated the Far North *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 255-257*

***Y. L. Ushpiz*[137]**

Translated by Bella Golubchik

On the first anniversary of the death of Mrs. Sheyne Rachel Klibansky

Last year we learned the sad news of the passing of one of our most outstanding women, Mrs Sheyne Rachel Klibansky, of blessed memory, somewhere in the far-flung northern regions of the Soviet Union, a place where many Jewish families from Lithuania were exiled. She was responsible for a numerous activities that strengthened the Jewish community there.

Her death has greatly saddened the entire Jewish population there, as well as those in Israel who knew her, because she was a most wonderful woman and a noble personality, of a type that is rare indeed among us. She was inspirational and refined. She excelled in all those fine qualities with which the daughters of Israel are blessed. She was highly educated. In her youth she acquired valuable knowledge of the holy books, the Bible, Jewish law and legend, and her expertise in these areas resembled that of a scholar. She was especially staunch in her faith and belief that God would realize the visions of our prophets for the Jewish people's future and their land.

She tried constantly to reach Eretz Israel, but did not realize this in her lifetime. Two days before she died, she expressed it this way: "Master of the Universe, you have allowed me to live many good years. I have endured years of suffering in my double exile with love. I have no complaints against you; my life's plan has been partially fulfilled. Yet if only you had allowed me to make *aliya* to our holy land, my entire plan would have come to fulfilment."

The deceased, of blessed memory, devoted herself totally to extensive communal work while in Lithuania, and continued her great work while in exile in the far north. There the exiles came to recognize her as the consummate communal worker, especially under the difficult conditions in which they lived. It is thanks to her that many families survived in those inhuman conditions. They owe her thanks for her exceptional dedication, charitable deeds and merciful acts.

This took place in 1941. On June 14, thousands of Lithuanian Jewish families were unexpectedly ordered into exile. They were transported in sealed train cars to the Siberian steppes, and some were transferred to the farthest regions of the north.

After much roaming from place to place, a few hundred families arrived at a remote village somewhere in the farthest north. The exiles included wealthy people from Kovno, the former capital of Lithuania, people who were well established financially and well integrated into society. Many were activists in political parties, socially influential people with connections in important circles. Eventually they became broken and shattered, consumed by despair, steeped in overwhelming depression.

When they reached that place, a long story of tribulations and troubles began. There were among them many families who had lost everything and were simply doomed to annihilation. The situation was horrendous. Each one was concerned first for himself, with how to improve his situation and escape from the demeaning starvation. Was it possible for anyone to be concerned for others, when he himself could barely exist?

But behold! Among these exiles there was one exceptional woman, who wouldn't yield to the dire conditions, to despair and bitter disappointment. Her goal was not just to find bread for herself. Her first concern was to find the financial means to sustain the tender souls of the children who were screaming and pleading for food. "Mommy, daddy, I am terribly hungry and want to eat. Please give me a little piece of bread." Parents cried to see their children's agony, helpless to respond.

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[137] Originally published in "*Shearim*," newspaper of the *Poalei Agudat Israel* party.

This didn't come easily to her. Nevertheless, after great effort she managed to gather a few of the most affluent, and after great exhortation she raised money for a free-loan and charity fund. She provided loans for those who had just begun to work and had not yet received wages, and gave financial aid to those unable to work at all. With this she managed to sustain many families. As a result, bread appeared again in many houses, and as the Bible says, "there was no hunger in the land."

This was among her greatest achievements in that place of exile. However Sheyne Klibansky, of blessed memory, wasn't satisfied with such deeds. As a woman steeped in the spirit of Torah Judaism, she was convinced that while the economic situation was dire, the spiritual situation was worse.

In the village were many young people who had not even an inkling of Judaism, and it was entirely possible that they would forget their roots. She assembled them in her room, which was actually too small to hold them all, and began teaching them Hebrew. She drummed Jewish values into them, with amazing results. Her pupils remained faithful Jews, both religiously and nationally, full of Jewish knowledge.

After 15 years, as a sign of their esteem for their devoted teacher, her pupils carried her coffin to the cemetery, a few kilometers away, at the peak of winter in the Arctic Circle.

The following story characterizes her essence and devotion to Jewish values, and also describes the early situation of the exiles. Passover was approaching, bringing its particular challenges. The deceased, of blessed memory, raised the issue of baking matzo. The reaction she received from all was indifference and doubt. How was it possible to even consider such a thing in the exiles' difficult and inhuman conditions? The general opinion was definitely negative.

Here her brave spirit was revealed. She refused to back away from matters of religious or national importance. After overcoming enormous difficulties, she obtained flour, hired a room for this purpose and with some others, began baking matzos. When those who had been indifferent saw her devotion to the task, they joined in her enthusiasm and all began baking matzos for Passover. Thanks to her actions, this remote community learned that Passover exists in the Jewish world.

She organized a communal *seder* (also with great opposition), intending to encourage the exiles, and it was very festive. Gentiles from the village stood beneath the windows and watched. The great enthusiasm inside the building affected those standing outside, and they also began dancing with great enjoyment.

That is how the spirit of Judaism penetrated the remote far north. Inhabitants of that place said truly that the deceased, of blessed memory, did much for the Jewish community there. Her activism saved them from extinction, in all senses of the word.

The writer of these lines, who was unable to participate in her funeral last year and make a worthy eulogy, dedicates this article to her unforgettable memory. May her soul be bound up in the eternal life of the people of Israel.

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Photos from Keidan Yizkor book following p 256



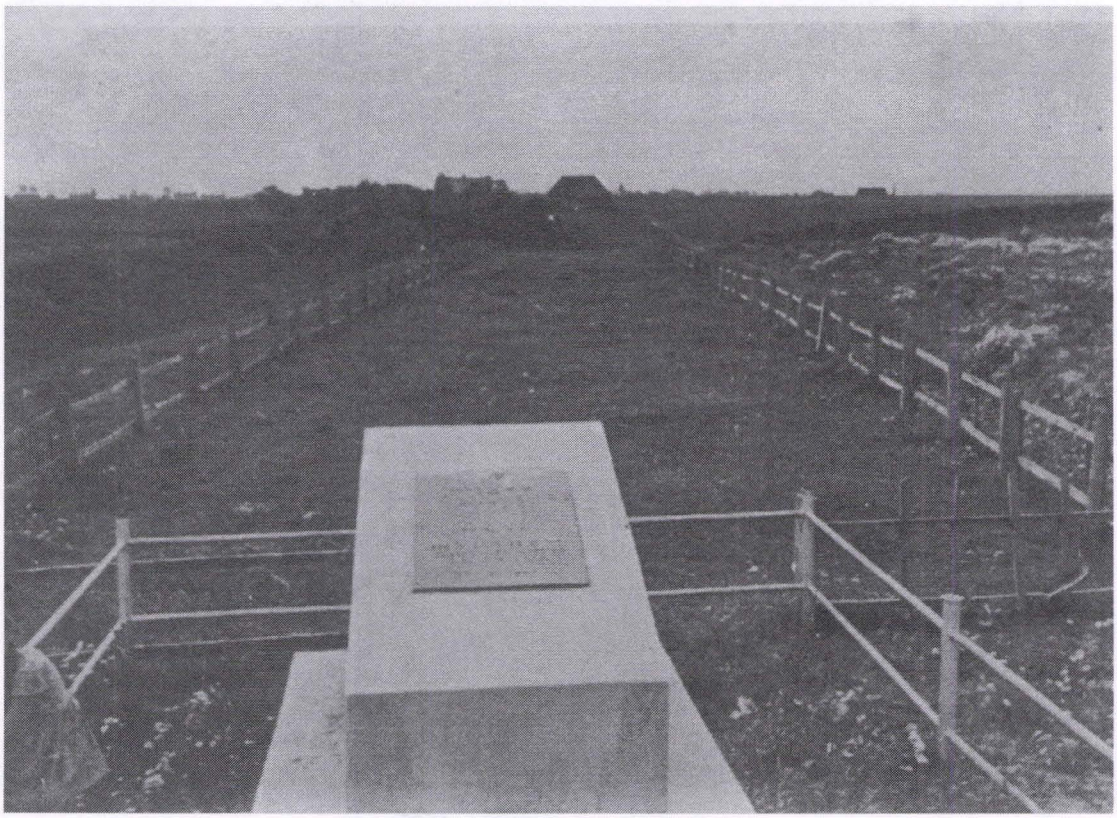
Keidaners erecting a memorial at the mass grave by the airfield



Commemoration Day, 1963



Top right: Memorial plaque for victims from Keidan in the Chamber of the Holocaust, Mount Zion, Jerusalem.
Top left: Memorial plaque for victims from Shat (Šėta), in the Chamber of the Holocaust, Mount Zion, Jerusalem.



Memorial for our martyrs at the mass grave by the airfield.

In the Red Army *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 258-265*

Ze'ev Ronder, Jerusalem

Translated by Bella Golubchik

We felt the first explosions of bombs dropped from German planes on June 22, 1941. At that time the general situation at the front was not clear, because, as everyone knows, Radio Moscow was silent until 12 o'clock, and never mentioned a word about the war.

At that same time, my parents heard Ribbentrop's speeches on the radio, announcing that the Germans had decided to attack Russia. Apart from this, only rumours, rumours. There were rumours that the Red Army was advancing, and many people believed it was a strong, regular army. Yet the next day the majority of Keidan Jews decided to leave, each in whatever way he could, and to move east toward the Russian border.

My family had a horse, and because we had a grandmother and because our father was disabled and couldn't walk, these two sat in the cart and the rest of the family walked alongside.

We left at about three in the morning on June 23, walking in the direction of Vilkomir (Ukmergė), but we only managed to get about 18 kilometres beyond the town of Shat (Šeta), and couldn't go farther because the Lithuanians already stood in Vilkomir, armed with knives. They claimed Jews had greeted the Red Army with flowers a year earlier. Almost all the Jews from Keidan were in Shat by then, so we remained in that town until the following night.

Toward morning it was already clear that the Germans' arrival in Shat was imminent. This was after the fleeing Red Army units had already admitted the truth, and advised whoever wished to flee, because the Germans were at their heels.

I was 17 years old at the time. It was very difficult for me then to leave my parents, because as I mentioned, my father was an invalid, and I was their only son. I had only an uncle,[138] a year older than me, and the whole family decided that he and I should try to get away. We were given two bicycles, but no money or provisions. They were simply forgotten.

Three other young men about our same age were with us. The father of one of my good friends, who was prepared to join our flight, approached my father a few minutes before we set out, and said to him: "How can you do such a thing? I would prefer to see my son shot before my eyes than not know what fate befalls him!" My friend remained behind. This family was massacred in Keidan, even before the other Jews.

We went out, but not towards Vilkomir, because we knew the Lithuanian hooligans were there; instead we turned toward Ponevezh (Panevėžis). The Lithuanians attempted to stop us a few times, but we evaded them and reached Ponevezh toward evening. There was already a curfew from 6 pm, and because we arrived after this hour, we were arrested and put in jail with youths who had fled from other towns, including some from Kovno.

This was done in order to check our identities, so we were taken to the NKVD in Ponevezh. We were awoken at 2 am and told we were being taken to an investigation. The five of us discussed among ourselves who should go first, and it was decided that I would. I was taken into a large room. There were tables on all sides, with an interrogator in militia uniform next to each table. During the interrogation I was asked my name, my surname, etc. Suddenly a man dressed in an NKVD uniform entered, and asked me "How did you get here?" This was a friend of mine from high school, older than me. I told him the truth, and he turned immediately to the interrogator with the recommendation that they free me and all my companions. We were taken into a cellar where there was an open buffet. Apparently all the reserve food supplies were there. We took cans of meat and ate on the spot. It is possible that we also dozed off for a short while. When we went outside, I saw the same friend sitting on a military

[138] Yehuda Ronder, author of other articles in this collection.

truck on which there were some "Maxim" machine guns. He allowed us to get up on to the vehicle, but about a quarter of an hour later a commander arrived and made us get down. We returned to the NKVD, where there were many bicycles. We chose the best of them. We also had a map in our possession and headed northeast, toward Latvia.

At that time I didn't know where the Germans were, but Ponevezh had already been destroyed. I understood that if the NKVD was evacuating the place, they were likely to be the last to escape. At the last moment, we decided to see about catching a train. We reached Ponevezh station and found a train there displaying red crosses. It was full to the limit. These were plainly freight cars, but we saw we might still be able to squeeze in, without bicycles of course. We gave the bicycles to some gentile boys who were standing nearby and got in. We stood, squashed like herring in a barrel. After that the train began moving. There were civilians among the passengers and also wounded soldiers from the Red Army.

In the course of the journey, it was clear to us that we were travelling toward Dvinsk (Daugavpils, Latvia). We passed through Dvinsk and crossed the old border between Latvia and Belarus or Russia. I can even remember the name of the train station: Bigosovo. There the border guards held up the train and said to us, "All civilians have to leave the train." We got off and began to wander about. A few hours later, a whole company of border guards arrived, carrying machine guns. They surrounded the whole railway station. Their commander said they knew we were fleeing the Germans, but they had been ordered to watch for spies, and to turn all the people back to the crossing through the old border. He told us they would soon send a train to transport us back to Dvinsk.

It is easy to imagine our situation. However, we decided to leave the train at the first opportunity. We heard the Germans were already approaching Dvinsk, so why should we be going to meet them? And so it was. Everybody got into the train cars, and at the first uphill rise, when the train slowed a bit, we jumped. We saw we weren't the only ones. Many had jumped and we began walking along the railway tracks, not knowing another route. Our map covered only the area of Lithuania, not Latvia. We returned to the same station and were met by the same border guards, who turned us back again, this time not by train but on foot. We decided to try again but to avoid the railway tracks. We asked a farmer how to reach another point on the border and he showed us. We turned slightly north. We spent that night with a Latvian farmer who spoke Russian. He fed us and when we lay down to sleep, a friend arrived who told him the Germans were only about four kilometres from that village.

Of course, after that we could not shut an eye. We dressed and again asked him the way. The border at that point was only a small river, which we crossed without even removing our boots. We continued walking and after sunset arrived at a *kolkhoz* (collective farm). This was the first kolkhoz we encountered meaning we were on Russian soil. We found no one there because it had been abandoned; a single hen was the only living thing in the entire place. We continued walking and came to a second *kolkhoz*. We saw the inhabitants standing ready to stone us with rocks, because they suspected we were saboteurs. Only after we explained in Russian who we were did they invite us in. Meanwhile they called the border guards.

When the commander of the border guards arrived with three or four soldiers, I began to explain our situation to him. Apparently my words touched him, but he replied that he could not permit me to cross the border that way. Then, as if revealing a secret, he told me that if we continued north about 10 kilometres we would reach a bridge, which as far as he knew was abandoned. There we would be able to cross. We set out and walked in that direction, but when we reached the bridge, we found the commander and a few others standing there with guns in their hands. They said: "Flee if you can! We are awaiting a reconnaissance patrol. The Germans are about to arrive in another few minutes!"

We moved off some distance from that place, and crossed without encountering a living soul. We reached a village called Asvieja, which during the war served as a sort of a center for partisans under the leadership of Kulpak. Many Jews gathered there, among them those who had been on the train and also some Latvian Jews.

For some reason we were now considered by the authorities (if it was still possible to speak about authority), as "evacuees" and not "refugees", so they didn't deport us again. In the evening we approached the commander of the town for help, but he said he was unable to provide it. He advised us to continue walking to a train station 60 kilometres away. He said we should only move by night because the German planes were bombing by day, and military units were on the roads.

According to the farmers, the whole area was already surrounded by the German army, and in their opinion we had no chance to break out. This took place on the 27th or 28th (of June), no later. Of course we didn't abandon our journey. The peasants fed us and we moved on. We didn't meet many Jews on the way. Valuable goods, gold watches and furs, lay about on both sides of the road and no one even picked them up. One of the peasants directed us to a certain forest path, and we eventually got out of the encircled area. We calculated we had travelled about 600 kilometres from Keidan, making many back-and-forth detours rather than walking in a straight line. In the last days our legs were swollen and we each had to use two walking sticks to support ourselves.

During that whole time we, five youngsters, never separated. We would stop to rest for only a few minutes, and barely had the strength to get up again. The only thing keeping us going was the knowledge that we had already come a long way, and that the Germans were about to reach us. I fell asleep on my feet walking more than once, and only woke instinctively as I reached a ditch. All this time we looked forward to the end of our troubles, thinking trains would come and we would get out of there. When we arrived at Nevel we saw no sign of a train, not even of train tracks. The Germans had managed to bomb everything, but the stationmaster was still on site. He gave us some large chunks of Russian sugar and opened a big tin of canned milk for us. He also gave us some dried crusts of black bread.

He advised us to continue on to Velikiye Luki, about 70 kilometres away, where we might be able to find a train. And that is what happened. We continued along the railway, a difficult and dangerous path. German planes appeared from time to time. We threw ourselves into the ditches but the pilots shot at us, even though they could see we weren't soldiers. When we finally arrived at Velikiye Luki, we found a train, but all the coaches were so full it was impossible to get in. To our joy there were also a few open-platform cars transporting large rocks. We sat on the rocks. We didn't care that these cars were open, as long as we didn't have to travel on foot. We didn't leave that place until the train began to move. And it actually began moving straight east, into the Russian heartland. To this very day I don't understand why the train cars were loaded with rocks and not people during wartime. Of the larger stations I remember Yaroslavl and Gorky, but we never left the train there because we were afraid of being separated from it and were trying to get as far into Russia as possible. I recall that we almost lost the train in Yaroslavl because one of our friends did get off. And we did actually lose one of our group in Arzamas, because he got off and didn't manage to return in time.

The authorities never bothered us, although they knew very well who we were. Fortunately we could get food at Yaroslavl station, because there was no committee assigned to take care of refugees or evacuees. Near Yaroslavl a few places were vacated in the closed coaches and we occupied them, frozen from sleeping on the exposed rocks. We even made jokes, suggesting to each other to choose softer rocks on which to lay our heads. When we entered the coach we met a Jewish family from Belorussia, and another from Karelo-Finland[139].

After we entered the coach and came into close contact with other people we became infested with lice. Neither I nor my friends were accustomed to such a thing. When we arrived at Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountains we were told there was an assembly point for evacuees, so we decided not to continue the journey. We were well received by the Russians at that point. They didn't ask too many questions. They only required identity documents from us. They saw that we were from Lithuania and immediately gave us food ration cards and allotted

[139] Karelo-Finnish autonomous republic, annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939-1940.

us beds. Before going to sleep we went to the bathhouse. There they disinfected our clothing, but it didn't solve the problem. We spent two or three days in Sverdlovsk and met some Latvian Jews there. I remember the Diamant family, from one of the settlements not far from Dvinsk. After a few days we had to decide about our future.

Suddenly, a man arrived to conscript people. He advised us to go to work in the mines. We were young and willing to work to earn our food, so we were conscripted. We received a small sum of money from him and went out to the workplace. It was apparently a defunct mine that the Russians wanted to reactivate because of the war. When we arrived there we were allocated a room and the next day we went to work. I was to take the place of a young Jewish man from Kiev who had lost his hand working with an electrical saw.

My uncle worked at the diggings. A few days later they decided to send us down into the mine. We heard from miners who had worked there earlier that they had had to stand in water up to their knees all the time. This was a coal mine. We tried to resist. There was a doctor on site and I complained I had a heart condition. There was a Jewish family from Minsk and I asked their advice. I told them among other things that I had studied music before the war and they wrote a letter in Russian in my name to the conservatory of Sverdlovsk. I received a reply that they would let me take the entrance exams. Based on this letter we, my uncle and I, managed to get released from the mine. I said my uncle was a pianist and they never investigated the matter.

Of course I never began lessons at the conservatory, since I hadn't intended to do so. If I had begun to study, what would have become of my uncle? The local people also wondered how we intended to survive the winter. We had only light clothing, and we were told that in winter the temperature fell to 50 degrees below freezing. So we decided to try to reach warmer places. We knew the Germans were still approaching. We tried to reach the border of Iran, to Uzbekistan. We got on a train and travelled.

We arrived in Tashkent and saw that the whole square adjoining the train station was packed with evacuees. At night it was difficult to find a place to lie down. When we got into the station building, the guard repeatedly told us we weren't allowed to sleep there and kept waking us if we fell asleep. We met another five Keidaners there who were working in Tashkent. It soon became obvious that it was very difficult to gain legal status in Tashkent: the authorities claimed the city was over capacity, and demanded that we move on.

We chose Fergana, which was also a big city in Uzbekistan, and headed there. We couldn't manage there. By chance I met a Keidaner youth there who led us to the Kuvasay station, where he was employed as a doctor in the clinic. His name was Silber, and he is now in the USA. With his help, I obtained a position in a chemical factory that had been transferred from the Moscow region, until I was drafted. Silber himself was drafted together with my uncle even earlier, in April 1942. Conscription was handled by a representative of the Lithuanian government who was in Tashkent.

There was a time when people asked to be taken into the army because otherwise they would expire from hunger, and it was common knowledge that the army had food supplies. There were of course also many people who wanted to take revenge against the Germans, but they weren't accepted, because Lithuanians were feared and not trusted. At first they said the Lithuanians had betrayed Russia. However, after consulting with the Lithuanian representatives they apparently changed their minds, and conscription began.

At first, when my uncle couldn't find work, he went out to a kolkhoz, about eight kilometres away. One should mention here that the Uzbeks somehow differentiated between Jews and non-Jews. They stated openly that they didn't like all the "whites," but that they especially disliked the Jews.

I received food ration cards from the factory where I worked when I lived in the city. Among these were cards for green tea, a favourite of the Uzbeks. However when I came to them to exchange the tea for potatoes or dried apricots, they did this with ill will and sometimes forced us to give them the tea very cheaply. Of course they didn't tolerate the Russians either.

When old folks were asked why they hated Russians, they recalled times when they didn't have to lock their houses and didn't know what theft was, before the Russians arrived. I continued working until I was also drafted, at the end of summer 1942. I was also drafted by the same representative and sent directly into the Lithuanian Division. I was relatively satisfied with this because I knew there were many Jews in this division and that my uncle was there too. I was taken by train to somewhere nearby Gorky.

I used to receive letters from my uncle, and I also got from him the address of Russians whom he used to visit in the evenings to exchange his tobacco for bread or sugar. He intended for us to meet at this family's home when I was conscripted. And so, as soon as I arrived, I went to seek them out and found their house easily as it was located precisely opposite our barracks. I spent about two hours with my uncle and also some other Keidaners, one of whom was an officer who was later severely wounded. His name was Dinershul, and he is now in Vilna.

There were Lithuanian nationals in the Lithuanian Division who couldn't speak Lithuanian. These were people who had lived on collective farms in Siberia since the First World War, or Russians whose mothers possibly were Lithuanian, but whose fathers were Russian. The group I arrived with consisted only of Jews, and the commander was a Jew from Belorussia. We stayed there a few hours because in the evening we were supposed to travel by boat to Gorodets, where the 167th Regiment was encamped.

We reached there the following morning and were quarantined for a few days on suspicion of contagious diseases, after which they began to train us in the use of Russian rifles and 81mm mortars. Apparently I wasn't feeling well, because I couldn't get up on the second and third days. My temperature rose to 40 degrees (Celsius). Meanwhile, everyone went to the front. Both the soldiers themselves and the civilians called them "cannon fodder" because of their inferior training. I remained in the hospital in Gorodets. This was a civilian hospital, as there was no military hospital there. I received my food rations and supplies once a week.

A few impressions of the Lithuanian Division:

Apparently it was not the only military unit in which theft took place. The cooks stole, and every day they caught someone stealing food supplies. I quickly had the impression that the Lithuanian Division was more Jewish than Lithuanian. In my estimation, from 60% to 70% of the soldiers were Jews. Among ourselves we certainly spoke Yiddish, not Lithuanian nor Russian.

One of my most unpleasant experiences occurred when my military greatcoat was stolen. My immediate superior hauled me out of a morning roll-call in front of everybody and announced that I had apparently sold my coat to buy vodka. He said they were going to conduct a court-martial. What was I to do? I thought I was finished. It was my good fortune that the commander of the unit would go out in the evenings with Russian girls, and liked to boast to them that he had a watch. For this purpose he used to borrow my watch. So when I asked for his help in this matter, he told me not to worry. He took two armed soldiers and went to the market of Balakhna. It was against the law to sell army clothing. He got hold of the first old man selling such a coat, confiscated it and brought it back. So the court-martial which had to take place was cancelled.

Stories were also told about incidents of *samostrel* – self-inflicted injuries, designed to put a person on the disabled list. I personally never witnessed such things but I did hear of them. There were also many Lithuanians ready to change sides and go to the Germans. My uncle used to tell the following story: It took place one cold winter night when he was sent with a reconnaissance mission beyond the enemy lines on the front at Oryol, accompanied by a Lithuanian soldier. The Lithuanian didn't know my uncle's nationality and while they lay at the observation point behind the enemy lines, he suggested to my uncle that they should both surrender to the German army and thus end their war, which he thought the Germans would win anyway. Yehuda's situation was perilous: he couldn't get rid of the Lithuanian by force, since the noise would reveal him immediately to the Germans.

He tried to convince the Lithuanian that it wasn't worth it for a variety of reasons. (I think the safety of his family in Lithuania was one of the reasons he gave.) In any case, after they completed their task they returned to their unit. I don't remember if my uncle reported this to his superiors, and if so what the result was.

I would like to mention a particular unit in the division. It was called *spetzrota* (commando) and its members were trained especially to parachute on to enemy soil. One of these was Abrashke Yosselevitch, who later was killed. When I met him in Balakhna he was in high spirits and even played the accordion. Siomke Yakobson was also among them. I was later told that Abrashke Yosselevitch was a radioman and was naturally carrying his apparatus when he parachuted. Apparently they were betrayed, because the Germans began to comb the forest immediately. Some people escaped and perhaps even survived. Abrashke fought until the very last minute, and at the end shot himself. All this I learned after the war, when our people went to the Council of Ministers of Lithuania to protest that names like Abke Diskant, Abrashke Yosselevitch and Siomke Yakobson were kept hidden.

As I have said before, I was in hospital at the beginning. I spent two months there and after I was returned to the reservists' unit in Balakhna. This happened in November. At that time they began to organize a Lithuanian State Orchestra, and I was put on the list of players. About a hundred and fifty Lithuanians were released from the army by order of a deputy of the Soviet War Minister. We were given a building, which didn't suffice, and many of us were accommodated in private homes and the work began.

There was a considerable percentage of Jews in this orchestra. The first director was Drazdauskas, who was a very extreme nationalist, and things got to such a point that Jews were ordered to speak only Lithuanian, even among themselves. We notified him explicitly that we would continue to speak only Yiddish among ourselves, for the same reason that he as a Lithuanian spoke his native language with the Lithuanians. Four members of the orchestra (all Lithuanians) were arrested by the local NKVD and accused of spying and treason. Some of them returned to Lithuania after serving their terms and some were rehabilitated under Khrushchev.

As mentioned, I was one of the lucky ones admitted to the Lithuanian State Orchestra. We were transferred to the small town of Pereslavl. I recall that the town's food supply was very poor, and the citizens looked at us unfavourably. Whenever we entered the shop that distributed bread rations, we always received ours without any problems, because we were still in uniform, and according to the law, soldiers didn't have to queue for bread. But people complained among themselves that their sons and fathers were at the front, while here were young, healthy men who had been liberated from the fighting.

Eventually people's attitudes improved, particularly after they heard our first performances, which included popular works from the front that were very close to their hearts. After a time the authorities stopped considering us as soldiers, and our food situation worsened. Apart from our bread rations, we received food in the restaurant three times a day: In the morning a plate of watery cabbage soup with no fat or other ingredients; at noon a plate of cabbage, and for a main course – cooked cabbage; and in the evening, cabbage once more. This was very difficult for young people.
We received 650 grams of bread per day. In fact we would exhaust our ration cards by the 15th of each month, and afterwards we had to think up new stratagems. For example we would exchange a towel, a shirt or a salt ration in the market for potatoes and similar things. This continued for two or three months. After that, our complaints reached headquarters in Moscow, and one day the order came through that we had to be given the same portion of food as those with university educations.

When we had prepared a performance, we were brought to a nice hotel in Moscow. Our first appearance was at the Kamerny Theatre in that city. The program of course included Lithuanian folk songs and songs in Russian and Lithuanian that were popular at that time at the battlefront. We also included "*Mayn Yiddishe Mame*," but without words of course, and also "*Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn*."

Pereslavl remained our base camp, and we left from there for our first cycle of concerts. We visited Chelyabinsk and Sverdlovsk among other places and also performed at the front. I met up with my uncle for the second time in Yasnaya Polyana in 1943. Our meeting was very emotional. I still remember two stories that I heard from Yehuda. One was how a Jewish major, a Hero of the Soviet Union named Vilensky, saved his life. This took place in a grove, after a bloody, difficult battle. They were inspecting fallen German soldiers. My uncle didn't notice that one of them, who had only been wounded, had aimed his machine gun at him. Major Vilensky was faster and shot the German. He then scolded Yehuda for not being careful enough.

The second incident concerned a German who remained alive and was taken prisoner. It would have been easy to eliminate him at that point with a single bullet. Yehuda approached him and explained that even though he was a Jew, and he knew the Germans had annihilated his people, he would let him live as a humanitarian gesture. This German fell down and began kissing my uncle's hands and feet.

Later my uncle was severely wounded when he stepped on a landmine, as a result of which he lost his sight for about half a year, and his letters to me were written by a nurse. He regained his sight after several operations, and described very emotionally his special feeling when the bandages were removed and his sight was restored. Afterward he returned to the front and was assigned to a Russian fighting unit in the Red Army.

We performed many times until 1944. After the liberation of Vilna in August, we were relocated to Lithuania. Before I left Russia, when it was already common knowledge at my workplace that I was going to Poland, I met a certain Lithuanian. Actually, he was half Lithuanian and half Polish, and he said to me: "Look here sir, you behave well, don't be afraid of me. I am a Lithuanian. Your place is not in Poland. You know, you have only one place in the whole world, that is Eretz Israel. There you must go!" I was thrilled by his words. The Jewish people were already united and tried to help one another as much as possible. And so I am very happy to be in our homeland, to build a family here.

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In the Lithuanian Division *Keidan Yizkor book p 266-271*

Eliezer Lipman, Tel Aviv

Translated by Chaim Charutz

I was born in Keidan in 1924. My father, Shmerel (Shmaryahu) Lipman, had a grocery store in Smilga (now Smilgos) Street, in a house that he had inherited from my grandfather. The whole street had only Jewish residents. During the summer months, my father used to lease fruit, vegetable and cucumber gardens. My mother's name was Cheine, nee Gurvitch. My grandfather, (my mother's father) was a farmer. In the small Lithuanian village of Kalnaberžiai, he used to lease land and work it himself. Before World War I this village was the summer residence of the famous Tsarist minister, Stolypin.

My sister, Sheine-Gittel, was born in 1923, while my younger brother, Reuben, was born in 1929.

Until 1937, I studied at a Hebrew school in Keidan and continued at a Lithuanian gymnasium until 1941, when the war started between Russia and Germany.

During the Soviet rule in Lithuania, my parents liquidated the shop and my father started working at the building authority at the Keidan military airport.

Starting from the first day of the war, the Germans heavily bombarded the airport and the town. Fearing further bombardments, my family moved in with one of our uncles, in a nearby village. The following day, June 23, news arrived in the town that the Germans were approaching the region. In the evening, when our parents learned that the Germans were near, they ordered me to go to one of our aunts who lived in the village of Petkunai, northeast of Keidan. My parents cried when they separated from me. They gave me a few articles of clothing, food and money, and sent me away saying I "should try to survive."

I set out by bicycle with three other friends. A few miles out of Keidan, we bumped into armed Lithuanians who took our bicycles from us. These were nationalists who had seized power in a few towns in the first few days of the war. We wanted to return to our parents, but were told that it was already impossible because the Germans were nearby. We were not far from a railway station. Just then an eastbound train stopped. We reached Dvinsk (Daugavpils) in Latvia, and from there, we walked on foot to the Russian border. We reached the border a few times, but were turned back every time. We were told we were Lithuanians, "foreigners," and that we had to go back.

Shortly before the Germans arrived we succeeded in crossing the border. From there, we were transferred by train to the autonomous Republic of Mordovia, to the town of Krasnoslobodsk. I was sent from there to a collective farm named after Stalin, about three kilometres from the town. I worked in the fields there, but the weather turned cold and I had no warm clothes. I therefore decided, together with my Keidan friends who had remained in Krasnoslobodsk (Nachum Levitan and Yitzhak Gladstein), and two acquaintances from Keidan (Meir Toker and Lazar Blumberg), to travel to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Tashkent has a warm climate and there is no need for heavy clothes. However, we were not allowed to stay in the Uzbek capital because we were "foreign elements." As a result, we went out to a collective farm of Bukharan Jews in the Tashkent region. The chairman had once been a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and was a Bukharan Jew.

The Jews of the collective farm, or *kolkhoz*, were devout and kept the Jewish traditions. The kolkhoz was well off. We lived in a room with a clay floor and were sent to work at a wood factory. At first I did physical labor and I later learned to work with the machines. My friends were a few years older than I was, and they were soon drafted into the army. While I worked for seven months in the factory, my living conditions were very difficult. With food coupons it was possible to obtain only bread, and a three-day supply was sufficient for me only for one day. For the next two days I was hungry. I did not want any help. Many people died then of hunger, and I myself was much weakened.

In August 1942, I was also drafted into the army's Lithuanian Division. I was sent to a

transition point in Tashkent, where all the draftees were gathered. These draftees were evacuees from Lithuania who lived in Central Asia. I stayed at the transition point for about a week. A unit of 12 people was made up there, 10 Jews and two Lithuanians. Among the Jews were two young women. We were sent to Balachna, near Gorky. This was the base of the Second Reserve Regiment of the 16th Lithuanian Division.

This regiment prepared a reserve of soldiers for the Lithuanian Division, which was already then fighting at the front. I was sent to the first platoon of the third company. The company commander was a Jew from Kovno, a former officer of the Lithuanian army by the name of Strazh. (He now lives in Vilna). The platoon commander was also a Jew, named Kaplan. He was originally from Vilkija, a small town near Kovno. Our platoon consisted of 44 men, of whom 30 were Jews and the others Lithuanians. A few Jews found it difficult to perform military exercises and the Lithuanians used to mock them. Three of the Lithuanians in the platoon were not evacuees, but had been released from jail, after having been arrested in Lithuania and imprisoned in Russian jails. From these jails they had been sent to the Lithuanian Division. They must have been in prison for crimes, as political prisoners were not accepted into the division.

In this regiment we spent the whole day doing military exercises. Soldiers were also selected here for training as officers. The choice was made on the basis of nationality: In the first rank were Lithuanians, members of the Communist Party or the Komsomol (Young Communist League.) However, because their numbers were small, Jews were also accepted. We Jews were not ashamed, and spoke Yiddish among ourselves. Because we were the majority, more Yiddish was heard here than Lithuanian. About Jewish holidays, we had no idea.

In April 1943, I was sent to the front near Oryol. At that time, the division required reinforcements as most of its soldiers had been killed in the battles there. The authorities took care to see that Lithuanians stayed with the regiment while Jews were sent to the front. The Lithuanians were required to free Lithuania, since the division was "Lithuanian." A few Jews also stayed with the regiment, veteran Communists who preached Communist doctrine among the soldiers. They spoke of the great honorable mission of the war against the Hitlerist gangs at the front. They themselves, however, didn't go to the front.

The regiment's food was very bad and we often went hungry. They frequently gave us three days' ration of bread that lasted just one day. Smokers often used to exchange bread for tobacco.

When we were sent to the front, we were given new uniforms. When we arrived at the division's encampment we were divided among the regiments. I was sent to the 167th regiment, and I was named the liaison between my company and regimental headquarters. I took part in the fighting starting from July 5, 1943, when the Germans tried to break through our lines. Before that the two rival armies had stood opposite each other in the same positions for half a year. A vast number of people fell in these battles, including many Jews.

According to my calculations, about 60 Jews from Keidan took part in the Lithuanian Division. The division headquarters tried to save the Lithuanians as national cadres. Therefore, their casualties was low relative to those among the Jews. It is also possible that the Lithuanians were not put in dangerous places because the Russians lacked confidence in them, and always feared that at the first convenient opportunity, they could switch to the German side. On the other hand, because of a desire to give the division as much Lithuanian character as possible, Lithuanians were preferred as candidates for officers' training.

In the battles near Oryol, I received a shrapnel wound in my hand, and was hospitalized for three months at Lipetsk in Voronezh province. There was a special ward for the wounded of the Lithuanian Division, which had many Jews. Of these, I remember Boris Rozhansky (who arrived in Israel in 1967); Nehemia Luria (he was then 55 years old), who was in the division with his three sons. One of his sons fell in battle near Oryol (winter 1943). The other two live with him in Kovno. There was also Fisher from Zarasai and Tuvia Gorski from Ponevezh (Panevėžys).

At the request of the hospital director, we performed at the concert of Lithuanian songs in

Lipetsk. From the hospital I was returned to the reserve regiment in Balachna in October 1943. Two months later, I was transferred to the regimental choir, which had been established at that time. Most of the members of this choir were Jews, amongst them: Rozin, Zatsepinsky, Sher, Ephros, Kurtzman and Meckler. We used to sing Lithuanian and Russian songs; Yiddish songs were out of the question. These were folk songs, and some were battle songs. I remember a song whose music was composed by Benjamin Gorbulski, then a Jewish youth aged 19. He is now a well-known composer in Lithuania. The choir existed for about nine months, and when the liberation of Lithuania started, all the choir members were sent to the division to take part in the battles.

In August 1944, I was sent from Balakhna with a reinforcement to the Lithuanian front near Shavli (Šiauliai). I was attached to 249th regiment there. My company commander was the Jewish officer, Senior Lieutenant Gurvitch, who was born in Mariampol (Marijampolė). He was a former member of Beitar, and was killed in a traffic accident in Vilna in 1966. Gurvitch's two brothers also served in the division.

I took part in a number of battles in Lithuania, and was later appointed machine-gun instructor for the new recruits. After a while, I was once more attached to the anti-tank unit of a regiment whose commander was the Jew, Wolf Vilensky. He received the 'Hero of the Soviet Union' award and lives at present in Lithuania[140]. I moved with my unit to the Latvian front, where I was lightly wounded. When I came out of hospital after a short treatment, I was not returned to the Lithuanian Division, but was sent to a regular Russian division. This was already at the end of 1944. I also participated in battles near Koenigsberg, and was wounded once more on February 7, 1945. This time it was a serious abdominal wound.

While I was in the Russian division, an anti-tank company was also set up there. Jews were not accepted for this unit. Its commander, a Russian captain, told us openly, "We don't need Abrahams."

At that time, many Lithuanians were already being sent to Russian units, not necessarily to the Lithuanian Division. It appeared that, despite the fact that Russia's victory was already certain, many Lithuanians were still deserting the Lithuanian Division. It was probably decided, therefore, to disperse them among Russian units to prevent them from organizing and discussing desertion. These Lithuanians, many of whom were murderers of Jews and had previously served in the German Army or in Lithuanian units of the hitlerist army, were afraid to publicly reveal their hatred for Jews, thinking that the Russians were the Jews' defenders. However, they soon discovered that the Russians were Jew-haters like them and that they had no reason to hide their enmity.

While I was still in Gurvitch's unit, we feared the Lithuanians would try to knock us off during the battle, and we worried about them no less than about the Germans. At the same time, the numbers of Jews in the fighting lines had decreased. A large majority of us fell in battle, and we became a small minority. Instead of the Jewish atmosphere that had been dominant within the division, there was now an anti-Jewish atmosphere. We felt threatened and fearful. We therefore tried as much as possible to be together and to lean on one another.

After my injury in February 1945, I stayed for five months in military hospitals in Kovno. When I was released I was discharged from the army in June 1945. I was awarded decorations "for bravery in battle" and "for the victory over Germany."

I returned to Keidan but found no one there. All my relatives had perished together with all the Jews of Keidan on August 28, 1941. Only one Jew survived the destruction, Chaim Ronder, (who died in Kovno after having received an exit permit for Israel) He was saved by a miracle from the slaughter. He was the one who told me about the fate of my family. I stayed in Kovno. There are no Jews in Keidan. The remnants of the Holocaust concentrated in Kovno and in Vilna.

In Kovno, I worked at the centre for restaurants, and from 1947 was the head of the Kovno

[140] After a long struggle with the authorities, Wolf Vilensky managed to immigrate to Israel in 1983.

Tobacco Trade Center.

The links of brotherhood among Keidaners in Russia and their devotion to the memory of those who were murdered are worthy of special mention. They help one another and always maintain close contact. The mass grave in Keidan was sowed over with barley until those who returned cleaned the whole area, fenced the place in and installed a fine memorial with their own money. Every year on the anniversary of the massacre they travel to Keidan to honour the murdered. When the local people started digging in the grave, searching for gold teeth, the Jews of Keidan complained to the municipality, the militia and military authorities. Yet the desecration of the grave did not stop.

Some Keidaners have emigrated to Israel. Those who remain still dream of making aliya but are prevented from doing so. I graduated from the evening high school in Kovno, and I also took some courses. I received a disability pension, all the while dreaming of emigration.

In March 1956 I went with my wife to Poland, and from there, in August 1957, I reached Israel.

Partial list of Jews from Keidan who served in the Lithuanian Division, 1942-45. Locations as of 1977:

1. Shaya Bernshtein – in Israel
2. Zerach Bernshtein – in Israel
3. Yosef Bin – in Chicago
4. Leib Goldberg – in Vilnius
5. Leib-Yudel Gurvich – came to Eretz-Israel in 1969
6. Leib Ginzburg– came to Eretz-Israel in 1957
7. Eliyahu Gamus – in Vilnius
8. Efraim Kagan – in Kaunas
9. Yudel Ronder – in Kaunas
10. Velvel (Ze'ev) Ronder – in Jerusalem
11. Chaim Teper - in Vilnius
12. Yakov Dinershul – Vilnius, now in Israel
13. Meir Toker – in Vilnius
14. Lazar Blumberg – in Vilnius, now in Israel
15. Chaim Lomkin – in Vilnius
16. Berl Lomkin – in Vilnius
17. Aba-Yankel Grinberg – in Vilnius
18. Moshe Shneider – in Vilnius
19. Shlomo Rits
20. Moshe Rits
21. Avigdor Upnitsky – in Vilnius, now in Israel
22. Hirshel Yoffe
23. Benjamin Kaplan – in Beer-Sheba

24. Tuvia Shneider – in Vilnius, came to Eretz-Israel in 1970, returned to Vilnius in 1971
25. Moshe Dameretsky – passed away in the USA

Jews from Keidan in the Lithuanian Division who fell in battle:

1. Itzhak Gladshtein
2. Nachum Levitan
3. Michael Rogov
4. Moshe Zisle
5. Shmuel Zisle
6. Feivel Dushkes
7. Berl Kaplan
8. Moshe Kaplan
9. Meir Gorklan
10. Michael Bin
11. Berkovich
12. Aba-Yankel Shneid
13. Yankel Dameretsky
14. Mendel Dameretsky
15. Merelevich

Among the survivors:

1. Pesach Shater – partisan, now in Vilnius
2. Moshe Upnitsky – partisan, in Vilnius, now in Israel
3. Michael Goldberg - partisan, now in Vilnius
4. Chanoch Sandler – returned from camps, came to Israel in 1967, now in Jerusalem
5. Moshe Crost – returned from camps, now in Chicago
6. Chaim Ronder – partisan, passed away in Kaunas
7. Fania Karnovsky – was in Kovno ghetto, saved by Lithuanian peasants, now in Israel
8. Shmuel Girshovich – was in ghetto and in camps, now in Lithuania
9. Ben-Zion Birger – escaped from the massacre, was hidden by Lithuanian peasants close to Keidan. Now in Keidan, married to a Lithuanian woman.

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The Mir Yeshiva *Keidan Yizkor Book p 272-275*

A. Simcha Hacohen Kaplan, Chief Rabbi of the Religious Court, Tzfat.

Translated by Bella Golubchik

The yeshiva at Mir, Poland, one of the greatest yeshivas in the world prior to the Second World War, was forced into exile.

This great Torah stronghold had existed for more than one hundred years. Out of it came great Jewish scholars who became famous through the years as leaders of Orthodox Jewry and supporters of Torah throughout the world. A special spirit surrounded this great yeshiva. It comprised more than 400 students. Most were proficient in Talmud, authorities in rabbinic law, deep thinkers and scholars in all aspects of Jewish spiritual life.

However, with the approach of the German forces, the executive of the yeshiva decided to leave the place, in which every stone was impregnated with Torah and moral teachings, and to migrate to Lithuania, which was under communist influence at that time. This was done in hope that it would serve as a temporary station en route to the Holy Land, the goal of every Jew, but especially of every Torah scholar.

This was an hour of emergency. All the yeshivas in Polish Lithuania crossed the border and reached Vilna. Although the communist regime was not yet interfering in the internal affairs of diminutive, weak, Lithuania, the eye of the "great Russian bear" was fixed on it. However, the yeshivas found a convenient refuge in this country – not only economically and spiritually, but also due to the Torah-rich atmosphere, which had reigned in Lithuania since ancient times.

Representatives of the yeshiva went out to all the provincial towns to seek a suitable place. They looked for a town that not only could absorb such a large number of yeshiva students but also had a suitable atmosphere, similar to that which the students had enjoyed since their yeshiva's inception in Mir.

They searched – and found Keidan.

Keidan was in every sense a typical Lithuanian town. The intelligentsia there – even those not close in attitude to the religiously observant – were however imbued with a sincere love of Torah. The Zionism of Keidan was not contaminated by the "winds of change" and these people behaved with respect towards the Torah and Torah scholars, because the Torah, in Lithuania, was an integral part of Jewish existence. They embellished their lives with Torah, their private lives and their communal lives. The fragrant perfume of Torah wafted over the life of every Jew, even the most simple. It was found in the home and in the street, at business and in the workshop. It filled the shuls and study houses. It was the foundation of their existence. Their hearts were as expansive as their intellect was sharp. Their welcome was as benevolent as their Jewishness was genuine. They were openhearted in their charity, and most of all, in their hospitality.

Keidan welcomed us, the hundreds of yeshiva students, me among them, in a most benevolent manner, with characteristic devotion and an air of kindness that was so needed in those beastly days. In fact, at that time, the yeshiva had no financial worries. The Jews of the United States, in particular the Joint, came to the aid of the yeshivas and we lacked for nothing. But man does not live by bread alone, and the Jews of Keidan provided us with all that was necessary: domesticity, an affectionate atmosphere and all the little everyday things that a yeshiva student needed.

It was possible at first to distinguish a slight hesitation by certain groups in Keidan, which was intrinsically Zionist. These circles worried that the yeshiva threatened their financing from the national funds, such as the *Keren Kayemet* (Jewish National Fund) and the *Keren Hayesod (UJA)*. But this fear was immediately overcome by their intellect and also by the love of Torah that was embedded deep in their souls. When one of the respected people of the city declared that accommodating the yeshiva in Keidan meant saving lives, and that they should

postpone any concern with the funds, they accepted the yeshiva with open arms, eager to extend all necessary help.

The Jews of Keidan instantly proved that their love was unselfish, and every householder in the town saw it as his duty to set aside a room or to allocate some space to yeshiva students, and this with every respect and affection. They were prepared to serve the lads and to bestow on them the feeling of a well-tended, clean home, as was customary among Lithuanian Jews. The housewives delighted in tidying up the rooms in which the students lodged. They were happy when a yeshiva student enjoyed their food or chatted with them about this and that.

As soon as it was decided to accommodate the yeshiva in the city, a decision was taken to organize a festive welcome party for the students and their leaders on the day of their arrival. The community organized the welcome celebration, led by the *gaon*[141] Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Feinsilber z'tz'l[142], hy'd[143] the President of the Keidan *bet din*. He greeted the yeshiva students with enthusiasm and great joy. Some of his enthusiastic words at that gathering remain in my memory to this day. He quoted from the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Gittin), "We made ourselves in Babylon as in Eretz Israel", i.e., Torah has come to Keidan.

There is no need to emphasize that the arrival of the yeshiva to Keidan altered the atmosphere in the whole town. Until then, there had been only a small yeshiva. The arrival of hundreds of yeshiva students, prominent in Torah and good thinkers, who were renowned among all the yeshivas, filled the townspeople's hearts with a yearning for Torah study. Yeshiva students walked the streets discussing learned subjects, and in the homes where they lodged, the voice of Torah was heard from early in the morning until late at night. The Torah was also heard day and night from the study house and penetrated every house, every ear and every heart.

The great Keidan study house (not to be confused with the synagogue, which was known as the "cold *shul*" because it didn't have a stove and was not heated in the winter, so they only prayed there in spring and summer) was packed to the rafters, and the citizens used to come to enjoy the radiance of Torah. This despite the terrifying feeling that this tiny state was being surrounded by mighty powers, any one of which was capable of crushing it in an hour. In particular there was a great fear of the communists, who had begun bit by bit to take power over political life. Everyone knew that the independent political existence of Lithuania would not last long and that the Russians would take over. If not for the awful fear of the German Nazis, whose murderous intentions had begun to infiltrate our lives even though the mass murders were still unknown, and the feeling that our lives were in peril, it would have been possible to feel blessed in this place and to study more enthusiastically and with more diligence.

Indeed, the short period that I spent in Keidan with the yeshiva was a period of the most intense study. A feeling of uncertainty about the future inspired yeshiva students to study more, to become more pure and holy, to ascend higher up the ladder "that stands on the ground and whose top reaches the heavens." The citizens of Keidan sensed this spirit of the yeshiva, and for their part, increased their affection for the students in every way.

I am still indebted to the woman who ran the house where I lodged. She made a special effort to fetch me kosher dairy products from far away, when she saw that I didn't eat the other dairy products, and she even refused to accept payment for these products, even though I didn't have any financial worries. She was a pious woman, my landlady, and she was proud of being able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Torah observance and to serve learned scholars. In this she saw the cornerstone of her life.

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[141] 'Genius,' a title of honour and respect, given to exceptional Talmudic scholars.

[142] *Zecher Tzaddik Livracha* = May the memory of a great pious person be blessed.

[143] *HaShem Yikom Damo* = May God avenge his blood. i.e., he was murdered in the Holocaust.

As mentioned before, even the most enthusiastic Zionists, who in the beginning feared that their funds would be jeopardized, became enthusiastic Torah supporters with all their souls. Even my landlord, who was an enthusiastic Zionist, became attached to this holy work. Even though he didn't belong to the Orthodox Zionists, he understood that it wasn't the right time to dwell on these things, and so he made great efforts to provide the yeshiva with whatever he could manage.

There was one tragic incident, engraved on my memory, from this same period:

As already mentioned, my landlord was not Orthodox, but his son had already abandoned the world of faith and crossed over to the communist world, which was supposedly perfect. On Yom Kippur, when we were in Keidan, he even ate in public. The lad was a pupil in the Lithuanian *gymnasia*, and on the day of Yom Kippur he picked up his school bag and set off for school, the same as every day.

I was at home at that time and saw his father's face grow so ashamed that it became twisted. He jumped up as if bitten by a snake and shouted at his son: "Over my dead body will you cross the threshold of this house to go to school today. I have forgiven you many things, but this I won't forgive." We all thought that a serious fight was about to break out between the lad and his father, but the family intervened. The lad conceded, but the father fainted later from agitation, pain and shame.

The communist influence was very strong in those days. The youth in particular saw them as saviors, after prolonged oppression by the Lithuanian antisemites. They saw the communists as liberators and were attracted by their slogans, but as soon as they entered the town it became clear that their promises were meaningless, baseless and spineless.

It must be said that, thanks to the presence of the yeshiva, the youth didn't stray much and retained a decent relationship with Judaism. This was also felt by the inhabitants of the town, who even from this perspective felt an affection for the yeshiva students, whose spirit of Torah countered the atmosphere of alienation from the holy tradition among certain younger circles.

There were among the citizens some individuals who distinguished themselves in that their affection for the yeshiva knew no bounds. They searched for every opportunity to give enjoyment to the yeshiva student or to give him pleasure in some way. I recall a certain Jew, named Gladshtein, who owned a large fabric store. He invited the yeshiva students to "buy" fabrics from him for suits or coats and jackets or trousers, or anything they might want, and when some of the students came and bought, he refused to take payment. Afterward he announced, as at Passover, “Let whoever wishes, come and take” fabrics from him at no cost.

He sent a sweater as a gift to a little girl, the daughter of one of the yeshiva students. When they opened the parcel, they found a bag of sweets for the child, sent by Mr. Gladshtein, hy'd.

This short period of the yeshiva's sojourn in Keidan remains in my memory as an encouraging time before the terrible Holocaust. A short period without financial worry, an atmosphere of affection and warm-heartedness, the like of which we did not know for many years before, nor ever again afterwards.

The yeshiva stayed in Keidan from the beginning of 1940 until June of the same year. In that month began the persecutions by the communist regime, which had already established itself in Lithuania in all its fearfulness. It is self evident that the great yeshiva, which numbered then about 400 youths, was like thorns in their eyes. The management decided to scatter the yeshiva over several small communities close to Keidan. I know how this pained the inhabitants of Keidan when they learned of the decision, and when the boys left the town, a great sadness descended on it.

I recall the following event:

The landlord in whose house I lodged, Mr. Israel Shneider hy'd accompanied me to the railway station and when I was already standing on the steps, he approached me and

pressed a book of Mishna into my hand. While sitting in the coach, after parting with him, I opened it . On the first page of the book I found, written by hand, the whole of Chaim Nachman Bialik's poem "*El Ha Tzipor*" (To the Bird).

Jewish Keidan no longer exists. It is buried deep in the earth, as is all of Jewish Europe. But all the hundreds of yeshiva students who were the recipients of the warm hospitality of the people of the town have kept this heartfelt affection and warmth in their heart until this day, and are still thankful. Among them is the writer of these lines.

May their memory be blessed.

Tzfat, Kislev, 5733

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The *Hashomer Hatzair* Kibbutz in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book, p 276-277*

Eliyahu Koenig

Translated by Bella Golubchik

I belonged to the *Hashomer Hatzair* kibbutz in Włocławek (Poland), which included mainly those comrades from the cells in Warsaw, Lodz and Kalisz. When the war broke out and the Germans began their swift campaign of conquest, we received instructions to gather in Vilna, which was about to be handed over to Lithuania by the Soviets. And indeed, a few hundred *Hashomer Hatzair* members from Poland gathered there.

Because Lithuania's government frowned on large concentrations of refugees, we began to spread out in smaller groups to different places in Lithuania. Our group reached Keidan, where we settled in a small building close to the railway station. We did various jobs, in the mill and in the fields, growing vegetables with different Jewish farmers, among them Tzadok Shlapobersky, who later became famous for his bravery. The local inhabitants liked us and treated us well.

When the Russians arrived in June 1940, we could no longer exist as a cohesive group, and thus we divided up, living among the local families in small groups or in pairs. I was on my own, working for the "Dirba" cooperative. I made contact with some Polish friends who had lived in Keidan for generations, and they helped me as much as they could.

As the situation became unbearable, we began to leave Keidan and move east, but the Germans soon reached us. Most of my friends were caught. I also failed to get far from the town. I was already close to the former border between Russia and Latvia, thanks to help from my Polish friends. But I returned to Keidan, where I found ten of our people, who returned after fleeing the Germans or hadn't tried to leave.

These were the first days of the German-Lithuanian regime in the town. Forced labour was imposed on the Jews. I lodged at that time with the Prusak family. He was the rabbi's secretary. The town's intelligentsia was annihilated, Prusak among them. Immediately afterward, all Jewish males aged 16 to 60 were ordered to assemble in the market square, with enough food for a few days. My Polish friends advised me not to show up for this assembly, and with their help I moved to an isolated house, which was at some distance from others, to stay with a Christian family. After a short while, the owner of the house demanded that I leave, fearing the death sentence that awaited anyone caught hiding a Jew.

At that time, there were contacts between former Polish army officers who had fled to Lithuania and the local Lithuanian people of Polish origin. Thanks to these ties, I received the address of a former Polish officer in Maišiagala. I approached him and he gave me the birth certificate of one of his son's friends, by the name of Henryk Motil. This certificate, along with my "Aryan" appearance, helped me in the time of troubles. He also gave me the address of an estate, where he himself was planning to go soon. Of course, I had prepared a suitable story for myself. I left my current place and headed for that same estate, hundreds of kilometres away. The farmers on the way treated me well, but obviously didn't know that I was a Jew.

One day I fell right into the hands of the Lithuanian police, who handed me over to the Germans. They accused me of belonging to the Communist youth league, and raised all sorts of other questions. Eventually they grew suspicious that I was a Jew, and a physical examination supported their suspicion. However, I had prepared a story in the event of this happening, telling them I had had an operation in my childhood, for health reasons.

I was led along with Russian prisoners. On the way I seized an opportunity to escape among piles of wooden logs near the railway station. The guards fired at me but missed. I reached the forest, where I became lost. After long wandering, I arrived at an isolated house, where

the landlady fed me. Eventually I reached Vilna, where I had a cousin, who lived in one of the streets that later became part of the ghetto. I spent one night there, but preferred not to remain with him.

I had the address of a former Polish officer who lived in Vilna, opposite Lukiški prison. I told this officer a new tale, that I was the son of one of the Polish officers. The story worked and with the officer's help I crossed over to the suburb of Žvėrynas.

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Hashomer Hatzair's Kibbutz *'Manof'* in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 277-278*

Moshe Domb, Kibbutz Kfar Menachem (Israel)

Translated by Bella Golubchik

After many hardships and torments, we gathered in Keidan, in Lithuania, to continue the training as Kibbutz Manof that began in Włocławek [Poland]. We were all graduates of the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement, preparing for *aliya* to Eretz-Israel; our ambition was build a *kibbutz* there and live on it.

We were all near to making *aliya* when the war broke out, and so began our flight from the Nazi beast. The movement's leaders briefed us as we wandered through the territories occupied by the Soviets in Ukraine and Belarus [in 1939]. They told us to head for Lithuania, from which, perhaps, there was a chance to make *aliya*. Indeed, we reached Keidan in Lithuania, and on the way we suffered our first loss. It was Shoshana Aharonovich, a girl of 18 who wasn't strong enough to withstand the deprivations. We buried her in Vilna, then moved on, still considering ourselves a training *kibbutz* with the goal of *aliya*.

Fifty-four comrades, all between 18 and 21 years old, reached Keidan. Two-thirds were males and one-third were females. Other comrades stayed behind in different places in Poland, to continue the movement among the Jews in the ghettos. Among them was Mordechai Anielewicz, who subsequently led the Warsaw ghetto revolt.

Our meeting with the Jews of Keidan was warm and heartfelt. We were a united body but we were young men and women who had all left dear parents and families behind under Nazi occupation. Parting with them was traumatic, and concern about our loved ones' fate gave us neither rest nor peace. The Keidan Jews understood our despair. They tried as much as possible to help, and to give us a sense of security and home, despite the fact that they themselves probably felt insecure about the future.

This help they afforded us quietly and modestly. One never could distinguish who belonged to the host committee, (apparently there was such a committee). People would always come on friendly visits, and always left with mental notes of the things we needed. These items always arrived without causing us to feel that we were receiving special assistance.

In the period before the Soviets took over Lithuania in the summer of 1940, we continued to exist as a training kibbutz, supporting ourselves working for the town's Jews; that is, to prepare for communal life we took whatever jobs were available. Each of us was somehow attached to a local family. We earned income from chopping wood for Jewish families to prepare for winter, the girls worked as domestic help, and we also did field work for Jewish farmers. We even tried to establish an independent agricultural branch and sought other types of employment.

I remember one incident connected to this. In addition to our kibbutz, the Mir yeshiva was also taking refuge in Keidan. The yeshiva students were mainly occupied with studying Torah. In our search for other sources of income, we tried to establish a communal laundry, and our first job was to do the laundry for the yeshiva students. But due to lack of experience, we marked their shirts with unsuitable ink, and ruined the whole batch of washing. Obviously, this whole enterprise failed and left us with nothing. Apparently we weren't worthy of serving Talmud scholars.

As mentioned, we were forced to disband the kibbutz after the Russians took over Lithuania, and we organized ourselves into smaller groups or even couples (where family units had already been created). We were placed with Jewish families in the town, and so the ties among us were strengthened even more.

The skies began to darken faster as the Germans put their schemes into action and invaded Lithuania. On the first day of the war with Russia, we refugees packed our backpacks and prepared for the road. We served as a barometer for the Jews of Lithuania. They said: "If these people pack up it is an evil omen." Indeed, we urged them to join us, but few dared to

take up the pilgrim's staff and leave everything behind. There were many reasons for this. Perhaps they foresaw our fate – who knows?

Only 30 of our comrades succeeded in breaking the siege. The other 24 suffered the fate of all the Jews of Lithuania. From among the 30 who managed to reach the Soviet Union, one friend, Kaiteck, died of hunger in the open spaces of Siberia. A second, Koba Shchensky, was killed in action at the front, fighting with the Lithuanian division, with many medals decorating his chest.

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Members of *Hashomer Hatzair* Among the Jews of Keidan

Pinchas Handelsman (Knaani), Kibbutz Kfar Menachem *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 279-280*

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Keidan! A name known to me since the days of my youth, when we read Sienkiewicz[144]. But who could have imagined that one day this name would become a part of our lives? Who thought for a moment that we boys and girls, members of *Hashomer Hatzair* in training for *aliya* to Israel, would become connected to that same delightful town, and be a part of it?

After the outbreak of war [in1939] and much difficult wandering, we reached Vilna and were shortly transferred (with the government's consent) to various places in Lithuania. Our kibbutz, "*Manof,*" was assigned to Keidan. I have to admit that in the beginning we were fearful, for a variety of reasons: The environment was new, we didn't know the people, and there were also language difficulties (as Polish was the language we were most fluent in). But to our surprise, everything fell easily into place.

The local Jews received us with outstanding warmth. They supplied us with everything we needed, and they met us with cordial smiles and encouraging, reassuring words. The Jews of Keidan ignored the official prohibition against employing refugees and took us on, at their own risk, to do all sorts of jobs. I myself was employed by the Yisraelov family, owners of a beverage factory that produced wines and lemonade. This family had a fine reputation in the community, and was filled with the spirit of Judaism and Zionism. I was very fond of the man who hired me, and whose behavior toward me was remarkable. I remember this likeable man, tall and broad shouldered, practical and thoughtful, who often discussed important current issues with me, such as the destiny of Polish Jews, the future of Lithuanian Jewry, and other issues. His wife, too, treated me in a most courteous manner and invited me to be their guest at home.

A few months later, with the arrival of the Red Army, many of the Jewish factories in the town were nationalized, including Yisraelov's winery. Not long afterward, most of Keidan's Jewish communal leaders were deported. Yisraelov's decent and humane behavior toward his employees stood him in good stead in that tumultuous time. All his workers stood by him and convinced the authorities to let the man and his family alone. And so it was ... He continued as an ordinary worker in his own former business, while part of his dwelling was turned over to officers of the Red Army.

In the first days of the war between Russia and Germany, I tried to convince them to flee that place with me, because the danger was really tangible. People then still believed in the power of the Red Army. But we *kibbutzniks* who had experienced 1939 knew that no one could stop the German army at this stage, so most of us took to the road. Some were captured by Lithuanian partisans and handed over to the Germans, while others escaped into the vast spaces of the Soviet Union.

Before I describe this new period of our lives in the Soviet Union, I would like to mention another family I knew, the Karnovsky family. A dear, elderly couple, who owned a bakery in Gedimino Street. They were among the few who managed to stand their ground despite all odds. When the Soviet (and Lithuanian) authorities dispersed the kibbutz, I went to live with them. They welcomed me cordially, treated me like an only child and assisted me in every way. Their home was my home. I don't know what happened to them in the days after I fled Keidan. Escape would have been impossible. May their memory be blessed.

Eventually I reached the Soviet Union via Latvia, and my first stop was Velikiye Luki. There I met up again with a few families from Keidan. Together we were transferred to Siberia, to a collective farm in the Toguchin district, Novosibirsk region. They divided us up among the

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[144] *See* "Keidan in the 17th Century" *from Keidan Yizkor Book, pp 16-18.*

homes of the farm's veteran members. It was my luck to be quartered for most of the winter at the same place as a well-known man from Keidan, called Baron. He was strong and sturdy, and in his work was an example to the whole collective, which treated him with respect.

One night I fled the collective farm and, after wandering for weeks on trains, I arrived hungry and bedraggled in the warm Asian region of Tajikistan. There, at a place near the border (this was our goal: to get close to the border – I say "our" goal because on the way I met comrades from the movement, so we could progress from there), to our great joy, I reunited with a family from Keidan: Raya Bernstein, her husband Shayke and his brother, Zorach. Raya worked as a doctor there. We lived together with this family for quite a while and we all helped each other.

Then came the day when we were conscripted into the labor force and returned to Siberia. So I was again separated from the Keidan Jews. These were the last I encountered, and I don't know to this day what befell this family.

I will always remember with affection that beautiful Jewish community that was annihilated and is no more.

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Embers from The Fire
אודים מוצלים מאש

Two Encounters With the Town *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 281-285*

Mordechai Karnovsky

Translated by Bella Golubchik

Spring. Early morning. Only our footsteps can be heard in the street.

Here, in front of Rabinovich's store, is the haberdashery. Above it the Friedlands' apartment. Looking left – Gurvich's pharmacy and Wolpert's shop. Another turn and I will see the street where our house stands, the house of red brick. Downstairs – the shop; upstairs – the apartment. In a little while, perhaps father will be standing at the corner, gazing near-sightedly at the road. Maybe mother will also be there.

And here, here is the street, empty and desolate. Here is Wolpe's shop, right next to us, and here also is our store. Everything is closed. No one stands at the door. I lowered my eyes, and trembled with pent-up tears.

Only now I have noticed that the entire street, from the military barracks to this place, is deserted. All the shops are shut and hardly a living soul is in sight. I was so preoccupied by the expectation of seeing our house that I felt neither depression nor joy. I passed through the long, narrow lane, once entirely inhabited by Jews. The Jaffe family lived at the end. Here is Berger's cinema, the *feldsher's*[145] house, the Weitzers. Opposite, the barber shop. Down the length of the street, all the houses still stand. Not one has been demolished. Here is Kagan's electrical store and here is the big grocery. Here is the wide courtyard of Rabbi Finesilber, the last rabbi of Keidan. There is the hotel. There is the sweets factory, Ginzburg and Karnovsky's fabric shop, and a store of one of my relatives; and Blumberg's large shop on the corner. On the other side, the new pharmacy, and Bilsky's shop, next to them Gladstone's store once stood. How all these names still come back to me! And opposite the pharmacy, a large yard. We once lived there on the corner, next to the extended Rochin family. And behind our house, the large Frank family. Here is Upnitsky's store, and next to it the photographer's lane. That is where we were photographed, a group of friends, with my future wife. And here was the shop of my relative, Mrs Greenhouse. And opposite – Ronder's large house. There in the yard, we played football. There we published the school newspaper on the "shapirograph,"[146] fighting over whose turn it was to print it. Srolovich's large house stood in the same courtyard as ours. The Hebrew progymnasium was once near our house and the joyful cries of the children disturbed the neighbors. Here first loves flowered, and here the youth movements started their local cells, before moving later to the tailors' yard.

Another few steps, and on the right – the market square, surrounded by the Jewish shops. Podlas' shop, Ginzburg's, Gadya's store, Klibansky's house. Another turn and there is the Friedlanders' house. And there – at the corner of the market – the houses of Bukshnevsky and Geben. There also, the Beitar clubhouse. The club was founded there and, as far as I recall, always remained at this place. Those were pleasant evenings in the clubhouse. We sang, we conversed, we danced or simply relaxed. On Shabbat days, at sunrise, we used to meet at the clubhouse for lessons in fencing, marching and so on. And here at the side edge of the market, the kiosk still stands, where we quenched our thirst with sparkling water on

[145] An unlicensed medical practitioner.

[146] Also called a hectograph, a printing process involving gelatin-coated paper.

flaming summer days. In the evenings we used to throw stones at its tin roof or just fool around near it. Everything still stands. All, lifeless...

I walked on to the bridge, the ancient wooden bridge over the Neviazhe [Nevėžis]. I stopped and looked at its water. There, on the left we used to go with father in the summer before the start of Shabbat, to take a dip. I turned away and the whole street, the whole town in which I grew up appeared before me. We knew every stone in its streets, every door, every corner. The main road of hewn stones, the pavements partially wooden. Our new shoes used to leave scratches in these streets and when we, dressed in our new clothes for holidays, strode to the many synagogues with the elders, we felt proud and envied. How can I forget those holiday evenings in the town? Everything was closed and locked. Everyone in the street walked at a slow, festive pace. Parents with their children, young men with their fathers-in-law. There was no fooling around, just a pinch here and there, a light kick, and then silence again. Where are they all, where are they? Silence. Death reigns in the town.

Before we went into the Kovno ghetto, my parents managed to send me a message of greeting. A gentile man brought a parcel. I was able to tell my parents that we had a newborn daughter. They knew my wife was pregnant. After the baby was born they asked us to name her after my grandma, my father's mother, Leibe. We named her Ruth Leibe. How they wished to see their granddaughter. They had only one son and never had the privilege of seeing his daughter. They didn't manage it. We received one more message and then contact ceased. We learned of their bitter end.

At this moment I am on the bridge, escorted by a German soldier, looking for a hiding place for my daughter Ruth Leibe, in the town where I was born and grew up. Perhaps one of my parents' acquaintances will take pity and agree to raise her and eventually send her to Eretz Israel, to my wife's family. This is the daughter whom we saved from the *aktionen,* the roundups and searches. How would we save her? We didn't worry about ourselves.

We were about 100 men and women, in the military barracks on the edge of town. We were sent from the Kovno ghetto to the earthworks at the big airfield being built near Keidan. My escort was an elderly German. I had told him that this was my birthplace and that I wanted to see acquaintances. This was in spring of 1943.

We crossed the bridge. On the right, the street continues to the Ronders and the Shlapoberskys. Where are the rest of the Jews, and the synagogue? On the left, opposite the church, lived one of my friends, and next to him, my relatives.

I suppressed feelings of pain and sorrow, and continued with my plan. At that time I still remembered the names of the gentiles I wanted to visit. I asked around, and now here I am, standing at the entrance to a house belonging to one of them. The door opened and instantly I recognized him; he also recognized me. He knew me as a little boy. He was astounded, embarrassed. Perhaps he secretly crossed himself. We exchanged a few words, which I no longer remember. No. He cannot help me. One of my father's acquaintances, a gentile from the surrounding area, came few days before the Jews were sent to their deaths and had taken a cart full of goods from the store to hide. He himself didn't touch a thing. No. He can't help me. We left. I didn't even visit a second one. I wanted to leave the area quickly. I realized that I wouldn't be able to save my daughter nor find any help in this town, which had not only witnessed the massacre but had also been complicit in it.

I thanked my escort and a few days later was returned to the Kovno ghetto. We continued to search for a way to rescue our daughter. Salvation came from an unexpected source: One of my wife's friends connected us to a gentile who wanted a daughter. Ruth was delivered to him.

In July 1944, the [Kovno] ghetto was set on fire after its last inhabitants had been sent to the camps. I was separated from my wife. She and her family (her mother and brother), were deported. Her father was taken in the roundup of old people and children. We decided to part. Whoever survived, if either did, might also save our daughter. Not a soul remained from my family. My aunt and her son were taken in the roundup. Her husband jumped from the bridge

on the way to deportation. A cousin who survived the Lodz ghetto, volunteered for the 534th Division and fell in battle. I myself miraculously survived after being in the 537th Division.

After the war ended, and before I left Lithuania, my wife, daughter and I stayed in the town for a few months.

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Fertile, black, hilly soil. A child's boot. The edge of a black bonnet. A scarf. A fragment of leather from a purse. Weeds....

I stand next to the large mass grave of my community. I don't cry. I choke back the tears. I look straight ahead. I cannot look down. Here they dug their own graves. Here they were slaughtered. Here they said their final prayers and died as martyrs, with the names of their loved ones on their lips. Supporting each other, the old, feeble and sick. Women, infants and children. A few managed to escape, one or two. Here a lone rebellion took place, by Tzadok Shlapobersky. He dragged his killer into the grave and bit his throat. He alone, the only one.

I returned to Keidan. We survived, my daughter and I. I took my daughter from the gentile who saved her life, one of the 36 righteous ones[147], named Alfonsas Sviderskis and his wife. We waited for news of my wife. Why did I decide to return to Keidan? At this moment it is difficult to remember. I had nobody in Kovno. An inner urge drove me back to the town.

I met Chaim Ronder. He had survived. We spent few weeks in his home, my daughter on the folding bed and I on the floor. I got a job in one of the offices. My daughter became ill. A woman came to help and took her to her home. In the meantime, Fanny Karnovsky also returned to the town. She was from the Karnovsky family who lived on the hill. I got a room with her and took my daughter back. Some time later I came across a young Jew from Poland who had gotten trapped in Keidan. He fled the massacre site and was rescued. He married a gentile girl from one of the surrounding farms. I also met Birger. He too had escaped and married a gentile girl. Still later, a young man from the surrounding area, by the name of Rubenstein, turned up. Then a few members from the Gel family; they settled in Yasvin (Josvainiai) village. One evening the partisans attacked them, murdered the husband and robbed them. We were 5 or 6 families in Keidan. The lawyer Gamus also returned and was made municipal secretary. He was a veteran communist[148] and had managed to flee to Russia.

I didn't visit the town; I didn't even approach our house. These were the days of the partisans and I slept with a rifle and a revolver by my side.

There was no feeling of victory. Although I walked about openly among the gentiles, those who knew me looked startled and puzzled. I felt numb and depressed but also hopeful. Maybe my wife would return. When I was in Kovno, I made contact with "*Bricha*"[149]. One of its leaders was Shlomo Gefen, who became a Prisoner of Zion[150] and later made *aliya*. I received documents for three people as Polish repatriates. This was the beginning of the escape to Eretz Israel. We waited.

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[147] According to Jewish folklore, God continually spares mankind from destruction for the sake of 36 unblemished individuals living in the world at any given time.

[148] Eliyahu Gamus (1905-1989) was in fact not a Communist Party member. A lawyer and Lithuanian army veteran, he was appointed municipal secretary in Keidan in 1940. He, his wife and two daughters were evacuated with Soviet administrative personnel after the German invasion. On the way to Russia his wife was wounded and his youngest daughter was killed by German bombs. Gamus later served as an officer in the Red Army's 16th Lithuanian Division. He emigrated to Israel in 1978.

[149] *Bricha* ("Escape") was a post-war Zionist organization that worked, often clandestinely, to help an estimated 300,000 Holocaust survivors reach Palestine.

[150] Term for one imprisoned by the Soviets for Zionist activity. Gefen, who helped Jews from Lithuania get to Palestine, spent nine years in the Soviet *gulag*. Released in 1955, he arrived in Israel in 1971.

One day I went to look around the town with a rifle on my shoulder. I wanted to visit our house, to ascend the steps, to touch the door. Maybe a miracle would occur. I reached the house. I raised my head. The same curtains on the windows. Here is the yard. Silence, silence at the Yisraelov's house and next door. I opened the front door. Here is the entrance to the shop and on the right, the stairs to the apartment. I ascended them slowly, slowly. I didn't knock, just opened the door. I don't recall the look on the faces of the couple who lived there. They froze where they stood.

The large kitchen, with the oven on the right. Here is the dining room, the bedroom, the high beds. It seemed as if nothing had changed during four years of nightmare, fear and trembling. It was as if my parents were about to appear, and I would hear my father's voice and the footsteps of my mother, small, measured, and worried. What has happened to her only son?

The apartment was silent. Here is the sofa, the table surrounded by chairs, the radio in the corner and the buffet. In this room, my parents were introduced to my future wife. The wedding date had already been set. Where is she, the mother of my only daughter, will she return? The rifle became heavy. I put it down and leaned on it.

"Do you want the apartment?" the man asked in a feeble voice. He told some tale about himself. I didn't listen. "Perhaps you will find something belonging to your parents? Take it," he said. I didn't answer.

For some reason, I don't remember why, I went up to the attic. Maybe I was told something on my first visit. Or was it simply an impulse. Or it was hinted in one of the last letters. Maybe mother had hidden a memento. I grubbed around in the sand and found two earrings, two rings and a chain. Suddenly my strength left me. I descended, slammed the door and went out. These earrings, the rings and the chain went with us through all our wanderings, until they were stolen in one of the camps in Austria.

One morning the radio broadcast an announcement that the war was over, and the reign of evil was overthrown. We gathered with a number of Jewish families and went out to the mass grave. We surrounded it. We stood in front of it and said *kaddish*. We looked wretched, very wretched, in the presence of the massacre. There was no urge to take revenge, even though we knew the Lithuanians' role in the slaughter. We were all armed and perhaps we could have taken vengeance on those whose names we knew. We did nothing. We gritted our teeth and spent our anger in inconsequential talk.

The earth began to burn beneath my feet. I was fed up with the town. Every few days I travelled to Kovno, to hear the names of the returnees. On one of these visits I learned that my wife had been released; she had been seen in Łodz and was on her way to Kovno. Meanwhile, the little girl was growing up. I couldn't be a mother to her, didn't know how to play with her. Whenever we went out walking, the gentiles looked at me with glassy eyes: "How did they survive? Look at them walking, these living dead. How did they climb out of the pits?" Yes, we rose from the depths and will continue to rise. As soon as our family is reunited we will leave you to eternal disgrace, to occupation and oppression, while we shall ascend the path to our homeland.

One day I went with my daughter to meet my wife. We returned to Keidan and stayed a short time at Fanny's home. Ruth began to smile again as her mother's care and love revived her. The little girl had suffered a lot and was now back in the bosom of her family, from which she had been torn so cruelly.

I didn't tell the other families about my plans, but kept them secret. The underground had warned us that we were in danger. One morning we packed everything on a cart, and Fanny accompanied us to the train station. Our parting was difficult for her. She understood that we would not return, despite the story we invented about one of us needing an operation.

We were delayed in Kovno a few days. We were assisted by gentiles who still live in Lithuania, so I won't mention their names; the wicked regime may still harm them. We arrived at Lida [in Belarus]. And after much wandering and a too-long stop in Germany, we reached our homeland, just as it declared itself an independent state.

Keidan, my native town! I don't yearn for you. I feel no connection to your streets and your yards and your schools. If at my first visit I still felt a part of you, when I left, all I saw was your ruins, your orphanhood. I have left you, but who have I left? Not a living soul, only desolation in your streets and a large mass grave on your edge. Your houses still stand, but they are empty. Your synagogues still stand, but God has abandoned them. What am I really leaving?

I didn't look back when I left you, town of my birth. May your murderers be damned! There is small comfort in knowing you are condemned to occupation until the end of time. Lithuania will not be independent or govern itself. The Russian boot has trod on you and will trample you. May it be God's will!

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Among the Ruins *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 286-290*

Chaim Ronder

This letter was sent to the Keidaner Society of Johannesburg by Chaim Ronder, a partisan during the period of occupation.

POGEGEN (Pagėgiai) 7 November, 1946

Warm brotherly greetings to you, Jews of Johannesburg – born in what was Keidan. Yes, what *was* Keidan, because Keidan no longer exists for us. The cobblestones of Keidan are soaked in blood and tears, and each time I pass Keidan, I see in my imagination, from the side of the Dotnuva Road, in a pit 90 meters long, 3 meters wide and 3 meters deep, our mothers, fathers and our little babies, weeping and crying. It seems to me as if they are pleading: "Open this grave and let us see how our enemies look today. The commander who led us to the slaughter, and – after Tzadok Shlapobersky wounded him by the pit and fell as a hero – shouted 'You leprous dogs, you infected the whole of Europe!' – how does he look today?"

And at the same time, I think: "Yes, you innocent souls, what a pity that you cannot rise from your grave. You would take great satisfaction to see how our enemy looks today. You could take revenge on the bloodthirsty dogs, just as I am taking revenge. You would see how they are rebuilding our ruined towns and villages, how they are reopening mass graves in the Slabodka ghetto and transfering the bodies to the Jewish cemetery. You would go through East Prussia and see entire districts without Germans. You would see a sign at the entrance to Tilsit that says "Sovetsk City" and one at Koenigsberg labeled "Kaliningrad," because Tilsit and Koenigsberg no longer exist. Their names and memories were destroyed by the heroic Red Army. The filthy Prussian military boot is gone forever. You would see all this and take great pleasure in it, as I do, but... unfortunately, this is impossible. Our sorrow is too great. The heart grieves and aches to think of times gone by.

My dear friend Chaim, I received your first letter along with your parcels. You ask me to let you know about your family. Indeed, brother, what can I write you? Their fate was the same as everyone's. I understand you and all our brethren abroad. No one wants to believe. Only those who lived through all this can believe. Unfortunately, I am the only one who remained alive and has seen everything. Your brothers, David, Benjamin, and your brother-in-law Yudl Shteinbach slept next to me the last night, on bags of oats. I pleaded with Benjamin, "Let's run away," but he answered, "I don't believe, they will not shoot, and secondly, where will you run to? There is no place."

Indeed, his second answer, that there was no place to run, was correct. If I could but tell you what I experienced during those three years... But that is impossible, no one can describe it and no one would believe it. More than once did I swim rivers in strange places, under a hail of bullets. There was a reward of 20,000 marks on my head but they never caught me. On the contrary, with a weapon in my hand, I brought some of them down and I'm still taking revenge today. In truth I am ill from three years of wandering in the forests, yet my revenge continues.

Dear Chaim, write and tell me where is your brother Zalman, with whom I studied in *cheder*. Where are Velvke Shilkeiner, Mendel Sadovsky and the other Keidaners? Write to me, all of you, because you cannot imagine how precious is each word from you for somebody who remained completely alone.

My dear Jewish brothers, forgive me for answering you all in one letter, but I believe you will all meet to read this together. Indeed, I cannot reply to each one individually, because you are many and I am one. But please, write me, each one separately, because a few words from each of you brings us consolation, especially as we are so alone here.

I received a letter from Itzik Setting's son, asking about the fate of his family. Sadly, I must answer that his father, mother and sister were killed on 28 August 1941, together with all the

other Jews. They were buried in the same 90-meter mass grave. His brother-in-law Yeshayahu Eides was killed with a group of 225[151] Jews in the first days after the Germans marched into Keidan. I don't remember the exact date, but I more or less remember that the following Jews were shot to death then in the Borer [Babeniai] woods:

Moshe Zalmanovich and his two daughters; Tuvya Jaffe and his son; Shmuel Abramovich (Leizer Elye's son-in-law); my cousin Benjamin Ronder; Faivel Friedland; Gedalia Berzak; Dovidke Michaels; Shmuel Berger (the coachman). Dovid Michaels was badly tortured. They flogged him until he was half dead, then poured water on him and beat him again until he expired. The manager of the Peoples' Bank, Kuldenitsky, and many others, whose names I can't recall.

And now, dear Beyla Kagan (Morgenshtern), I received your letter. Unfortunately I cannot bring you good news with my reply. The fate of your family is identical to that of all the others. I can only tell you a few details about your brother, Efraim. On 15 August 1941, Saturday, at 7 in the morning, all of us, inhabitants of Keidan, were driven out of our houses and forbidden to take anything with us. Old and young, big and small, mothers with babies in their arms were all brought to the synagogue yard. There they lined us up in rows of four and marched us through Smilga Street to the Keidan courtyard.[152] German and Lithuanian policemen, armed with submachine guns and automatic weapons, walked alongside. I was in the first rows, together with your brother, Efraim. We all wore yellow Stars of David, one on the chest and another on the back....

The sight and the atmosphere were terrifying. They locked us in a large warehouse there, 3,700 people. Together with us they brought Jews from Shat and Zheim [Šėta and Žeimiai]. There was no place to lie down, or even space to stand. We remained in these conditions until the day of the massacre, August 28. On August 26, Hirshel Levyotkin was found hanging in that same warehouse, among some carts. He was still warm when we took him down from the gallows. I, your brother Efraim, Moshe Levyotkin, David Geben and Tzadok Shlapobersky brought him to the Jewish cemetery and buried him.

When we left the cemetery, its new owner, a farmer named Stankiewicz, whom I took out after I was liberated, demanded that we pay for the wooden planks, which belonged to us. We paid him 100 marks and together all burst into tears like little children, realizing that even old acquaintances wanted our blood. I never saw Efraim again after that. Indeed, Beylinka, in your letter you remind me of how I used to come on horseback and similar memories from our younger days. You mention Basha Ronder, with her friendly greetings — but what can we do, they are no more. All that remains is a ghastly pit, dark and long, which we have fenced in with steel wire.

Abrasha Kagan kissed me ten minutes before his death and cried, saying: "Never mind, our blood will be avenged." He didn't lie. Vengeance has come and how deep is my joy that I participated, and I am still taking part to this day.

Berl, why have you not written a few words? Believe me, because I feel so lonely, every word of yours brings comfort. When I receive a letter from abroad, from any one of you, my heart swells and my eyes fill with tears of joy. Because, as I have written before: Keidan no longer exists and you are its only remnants. So, every word from you brings consolation.

Ten days ago I was in Vilna, at Guta Kagan's. I stayed over with her for six nights. She is the only friend left with whom I can share memories. Berl, may I trouble you to find, in Johannesburg or elsewhere, my two cousins, Aba Ronder and Gavriel Ronder. Please give them my address and ask them to write to me.

In 1944, four months after my liberation, I received a telegram from the Keidan Jews in Africa, with the following contents: "As we have been informed that you have survived, we ask you

[151] Other sources put the number shot at Babenai at 125, including Jews and others.

[152] This likely refers to the Zhirgynas stables outside Keidan.

to send us the names of the Jews of Keidan who remained alive. Then we will send urgent help." Unfortunately, there was no return address, so I couldn't contact you.

A few days later, I received a second telegram, from Aba Ronder, asking about his sister, Hirsh Golombek's wife. I replied and never heard from him again. Let him know that his sister was killed in Keidan together with all the Jews. His sister-in-law, Sarah Ronder from Shavl [Šiauliai] is alive. She returned from the Stutthof camp in Germany, her two children perished in the death camp. Also his relatives, the Brett family from Shadove [Šeduva] remained alive. Please, look for him and ask him to contact us. We are together in Pogegen [Pagėgiai], also my cousin Velveh Ronder's youngest son, who returned from the battlefront, is here. Where is David Rappoport? If he is in Johannesburg, he should write to me. He was one of my best friends from childhood.

I must dedicate a special account of those sad days to Tzadok Shlapobersky. His name sets an example of bravery, for me and for all of us. He has entered the annals of history of the Jews of Keidan. Hirsh Shlapobersky, be comforted that your brother Tzadok was the one who in the last minutes before his death, dragged the German commander into the pit and injured him. At that moment, the shooting stopped and policemen, wanting to save the commander, jumped into the pit with their bayonets. A life-and-death struggle followed. As a result, Tzadok bit the throat of one of the policemen, who fell like a dog on the spot. He also injured a second policeman, who died a few days later. Because of this, they stabbed Tzadok with their bayonets till his body became like a sieve. He was the only one who died as a hero and took vengeance on the bloodthirsty dogs. On August 28 you should at least be consoled by your brother's bravery. I personally will never forget him, since he was one of my best friends, if not the best of them.

And now about your sister Rashel. In February 1945 I was in Kovno for a few days. Suddenly I learned that in the region of East Prussia that had been taken by the heroic Red Army, a few hundred women had been liberated, of whom 13 had reached Kovno and among them was a woman from Keidan, named Shlapobersky. I searched half a day until I found her. I have no words to describe how she looked. Wearing a flimsy dress, with a yellow star of David on her back, she was completely swollen, her hands and feet frozen. We both burst into tears because she was the first and the only woman from Keidan who had returned from the hell of the camps. Weak and hungry, she was unable to walk. I quickly got her a fur coat and felt boots and brought her to Keidan by car. There I arranged a place for her with a Christian acquaintance. I took care of her and gave her medicine.

At this same time, I received a letter from a young man from Krakinova (Krekenava), who had returned from the battlefront (his family name was Peipert). He wrote that he had found a Jewish girl living with a Christian man, who said she was the daughter of Eliyahu Shlapobersky from Keidan. I helped Rashel as much as I could until April 16, when I left for East Prussia. She is presently in Vilna, bringing up Eliyahu's daughter.

And now, about your brother, Eliyahu Shlapobersky. It is known that he lived in Kovno and was in the Kovno ghetto until 1943. In 1943, the Germans transferred 500 Jews from the Kovno ghetto, men and women, to Keidan and established a camp for them. Among these were Gurvich the pharmacist's two daughters Mina and Zhenia, and your brother Eliyahu. I was then in a partisan unit which was fighting in the area of Keidan, Jonava, Kovno and Vilkomir [Ukmergė]. When I heard that a Jewish camp had been established in Keidan and that Eliyahu was there, I contacted them, with great difficulty. We secretly sent them weapons and in November 1943 I went with a group of fifteen people to the Keidan airfield. We crossed to the Borer woods in small boats, attacked the guards in the middle of the night and brought out 25 Jews. During the action, two Jews from the camp were killed along with three partisans and four Germans. We didn't manage to achieve any more than this, as we would all have been killed if we tried.

From the liberated Jews I learned that Eliyahu had been sent back two weeks earlier to the Kovno ghetto, where he perished when the Germans set the ghetto on fire as they retreated. So, dear Hirsh, you have an exact picture from a living witness who saw all this.

I think that this is enough for today, because if I wanted to describe for you everything that I have experienced, there wouldn't be enough paper and ink. Also, the nerves wouldn't allow it. I began writing this letter at 9 in the evening, and it is already 4 in the morning. Dear Chaim, Berl, Beyla and other friends from the former Keidan, write to me, each of you separately, and I will answer you all together. I would like to know details about everyone, since I studied in cheder with many of you. How good it was then! And today? Alone, broken, the souls of our family members who were killed are in front of me always.

Today we celebrated the great holiday of the October Revolution. Thanks to the mighty Red Army, we remain alive and continue to exist, in defiance of all our enemies. And if the dark forces of reaction try again, their fingers will be burnt, because we are the victors. We fought for a just cause, and the Goerings, Streichers, Rosenbergs and their followers are now swinging from the gallows. Those who have not yet been hanged, will be strung up — may their names and memories be obliterated.

Dear brothers, I end my letter and wish you all a good future.

Your brother and friend, Chaim Ronder.

I'd also like to ask the Jews from the older generation to write to me. We don't know each other but they knew my father and they remember Yudl Ronder when he was in Africa. Are Pesach Stein and Chana Shayevich in Johannesburg? I studied in *cheder* with them.

My address:

Lithuanian SSR,
District Department of the Commisariat of the Internal Affairs,
Pogegen Town,
Ronder Chaim Yudelevich.

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Torah Scrolls *Keidan Yizkor Book p 290*

Chaim Ronder, as told to Ze'ev Ronder

Translated by Bella Golubchik

I hid in the forests for a time after escaping the murderers in Keidan. As the cold was intensifying, I sought out some kind people to shelter me. I approached a goodhearted farmer, named Savitzky, in the village of Madkesht (Medekšiai) near Keidan. He received me warmly. I was fed and offered a place to rest for the night, on a shelf above the stove. I lay down and the warmth permeated my whole body. Suddenly I realized that the walls of the house were papered with parchment from Torah scrolls.

Terror-stricken, I dressed in my wet clothes and told Savitzky I had to leave. Savitzky was bewildered that I would so suddenly decide to leave after just having begged permission to stay the night. In that same freezing night, I returned to the forest.

A short time later, when my desperate situation brought me back to Savitzky's house, I found the walls had been covered over with Lithuanian newspapers.

Savitzky, a decent human being, had understood why I abandoned his house on that freezing cold night.

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The Destruction of Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book p 291-3*

Rabbi Y. M. Fishleder (Mexico)

Translated by Chaim Charutz

"How deserted lies the city..." (Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:1)

How did it happen that my city of birth, Keidan, was left lonely and abandoned, without its holy community? No one is left there to be amazed by its reputation, by the names of its great sons of Israel, the knowledge of whom spread throughout the world for hundreds of years. One of these was "*Pnei Moshe*" (the Face of Moses), the commentator on the Jerusalem Talmud at the beginning of the 18th century. He was the teacher of the Vilna Gaon, our Rabbi Eliyahu of blessed memory, who drank at this fount of Torah and thus acquired great virtues. Another exceptional personality was the well-known genius, the great paragon, well-educated in the wisdom of the Torah, Moshe Leib Lillienblum. He was widely known as a great thinker, Hebrew writer and Lover of Zion in the mid-19th century.

My memories, however, relate to the years of my childhood. When I was 12, I had already left Keidan to study in foreign places. I studied in many yeshivas, large and small: The old Zhager Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Ben-Zion; in Kovno. Also in Vilna, at the Rav Maalot Yeshiva, led by Rabbi Tzvi Grodzensky (the brother of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky); in Kelm (headed by Rabbi Eliyahu); in Lida (under Rabbi Yitzhak Reines); in Sheduva (under Rabbi Aharon Baksht); and Slabodka-Kovno (headed by the *gaon* Rabbi Baruch Dov-Ber Leibovitch). All this happened prior to 1915, when all Jews were expelled from Lithuania.

As far as I remember, the following held important positions in Keidan: Rabbi-Gaon Kamai (the son of Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch of Mir), and in all fields of Jewish needs: Rabbi Zalman Frank, Rabbi Benzion Agish, Zundel Ginzburg, Yakov Wolpe, Sender Yaffe, Yakov Kurlianchik, my father, Rabbi Avraham Fishleder, and the late Rabbi Nissan Bank of blessed memory. All were dedicated and fully involved with the public's needs in matters of faith. They always cared for the poor and depressed, marrying off brides, freeing those held captive. They kept the *mitzvot* of hospitality by helping visitors in the synagogue or hosting them at their own homes on Shabbat and holidays. This mitzvah was deeply embedded in the souls of all the Jews, the simple and the traditional, the educated and the learned. This was carried out as a daily command, to fulfill the commandment of our holy Torah: "And your brother will live with you."

As far as I know from reliable sources, my father Avraham of blessed memory, who was also known by the name Leah-Leibish, used to open the doors of his house at 16 Smilga Street and receive with open arms all sorts of refugees and yeshiva students who had fled their homes during the First World War. Examples of people who fled their yeshivas were those of Radun, Mir and Telz. My father literally sacrificed himself to support them to the extent of his abilities, with food, drink and lodging.

Behold, all this has disappeared leaving not a trace. Within a short time, some of Keidan's leading scholars were themselves forced to leave their homes. Among these: the poet Zvi (Hirsh) Bloshtein (the son of Reyzel the dough-kneader); Moshe Strashunski (a ritual slaughterer); Benish (a ritual slaughterer); Finkelstein, who wrote for the publication "*HaZman*" (the son of Reb Moshe Feive-Leizers, the well known teacher and manager of the "Seven Guests" synagogue); as well as teachers –intellectuals such as Reb David Itsches, M. Telzer, and others. None like these exist any longer in Keidan which, before the First World War, had between six and seven thousand souls.

The one and only consolation that remains within my heart is that some of the townspeople managed to disperse in time throughout the world. In this regard I can think that "This nation can be compared to oil. As oil gives its light to the world, so does Israel give its light to the world"; as it is said, "Nations came to your light." (Isaiah, 60:3). Nations will have to realize, in the final account, that "thanks to Israel the world was created," – that is, only because of the merit of the Jewish people does the world exist. Keidan, therefore, joins all the destroyed

cities and towns that were emptied of their Jewish populations in the days of Hitler (may his name be erased).

And here, my city of Keidan stands before the heavenly court and testifies "how deserted lies the city." The city, which lost its saints and its pure ones, constantly mourns the loss of its beautiful Sabbath days and her holy silence, a time when her learning houses and synagogues were filled by worshippers, students of Torah, rabbis, slaughterers, synagogue officials and simple Jews – the keepers of the Torah's commandments. She has been left naked, without Torah, without work and without charity, the "three things on which the world stands" (Ethics of the Fathers. 1:2.)

"Lord of the Universe, how can you look when only impure gentiles rule over her? On the Neviazhe bridge, on the roads leading to Totleben's court and to the railway station, and in the Borer woods, no longer do happy and sensitive youths fill the air with songs and joy, so that even the flowers of the meadow and the grain in the fields sang with the birds, and your youth was surrounded by pleasant scents."

But, behold, a divine voice is heard, saying: "You should know, poor widow, that as long as the people of Israel believe in God (blessed be He), salvation will finally come, and its spiritual power, clothed by the holiness of the Torah, will fill the whole world. You must record this terrible period in your heart, so that it will always be before your eyes, and it will remain in your memory for generations." We must never forget that in the middle of the 20th century, the Jewish people lost a third of their total number, spread out over all the continents, at the hands of the Nazi terrorists, who wished to tear them out by their roots. These terrorists, however, were defeated in their evil ways, thanks to the fact that a few world leaders found some right in the existence of the people of Israel.

The Jewish people may have been hurt in body, but not in spirit. Their ideals and prophetic spirit did not die. Because of this, this period needs to be deeply engraved in our memories, as well as in the memories of those who did not experience these terrible happenings. They must also carry this message to their children's children.

It is so difficult to write about the cruel happenings in the days of Hitler (may his name be erased). These happenings shock the soul, raise a feeling of pain in the depths of the soul, and freeze the blood in our veins whenever we remember what happened to the Jewish people in the Valley of Tears.

To the blood-stained pages of Jewish history, to the blood libels, the cruel persecutions of 1648-1649, we must add the Holocaust and the destruction of Jewish lives that fill pails of tears. This is all the more important while Jewish blood has not yet dried, and while the Angel of Death, in the form of cruel rulers, has still not returned his sword to its scabbard, while the blood on the blade still has not dried, and while his hand is still ready to strike and to slaughter; while anti-semitism still has not been rooted out, and while we do not yet know what the future will bring, and we still cannot rely on the grace of nations.

Furthermore, in the lands of the diaspora, even if we beautify our clothes, they do not fit us and they do not put our souls at rest. The stench of poisonous Jew hatred stinks in all cormers of the world. We still have to hold onto the idea that "our hope is not yet lost." We will still rise over the fountains of tears which my mother Reizel and other mothers spilled. The words of my mother still echo in the ears of the remnants of Israel: "Do not let them deceive you, O Jews; they are leading us all to the crematoria !".

We will recover from the bloody days, from the women who were tortured. We will avenge my brothers Benjamin and Velvel and their families, who fell as partisans in the forests surrounding Keidan. We will avenge our saints, our parents and in-laws: Reb Yakov-Zeev Pushcar, a righteous and innocent man, and Itke, a righteous woman, who were slaughtered together with their son Elimelech (Zeidke), a great God-fearing man, by the Nazi murderers in the Bialystok region. We will avenge the saints of Israel, who were burnt by murderers in the crematoria. Revenge for our holiness which was desecrated by the cruel, unclean ones.

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Many Murderers Still Walk Free *Keidan Yizkor Book pp 294-295*

***Excerpts from the letters of Yehuda Ronder** of Keidan, now (1977) living in Kovno.*

Translated by Bella Golubchik

September 13, 1964

A short time ago, two of the murderers of the Jews of Keidan went on trial. One had a finger bitten off on August 28, 1941 by the mass grave. They were each sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Many of the murderers still walk free in the world.

I don't remember if I have written to you about the "milky" one who was saying "yura" by mistake. She was an important clerk, and was exposed: She had dealings with the Gestapo and with the murderers of Jews; and she herself used to go to the places where they tortured Jews. May their blood blind their eyes!

October 7, 1964

I could write a lot about the trial of the two murderers from Keidan, but it's hard for me to write about such things. The trial was conducted *in camera*, and no one heard anything, but I was informed by witnesses about many details.

Many of our teachers from the high school held guns in their hands when the Jews were being shot: Tylenis, the principal in 1935-1940, Dutkauskas, the principal in 1940-1941, the art teacher Vaškevičius, the teachers Vedegys, Kabelis, the music teacher, Karaška (now living in Kovno).

The two standing trial were Berankis and Gylys.

The Jews showed resistance. When a group was being led to the pit, one of the Jews (possibly my brother or your father), grabbed the rifle from the murderer Garšva and fired at him. He hit Garšva in the leg and the murderer was taken, bleeding, to the hospital. The Jewish hero was shot down immediately in the airfield, some distance from the pit. The murderer Garšva now lives in Gotha, and walks with a limp.

Tzadok Shlapobersky, while naked, attacked the murderer Čižas, bit his throat, grabbed his revolver from him, shot him in the back and killed him. Tzadok also tried to shoot the German commander who stood next to the pit, but the German panicked and jumped into the pit where he was only slightly hurt by some of the other Jews, who were still alive, because the murderer Jankunas jumped in to aid him.[153]

Another unknown Jewish hero tried to kill the murderer Berankis (who was now on trial), using a pocket knife, next to the pit, but he managed only to wound him gravely in the back of his head.

The murderer Gylys shot twice in Babian at a young Jewish woman, a member of the Communist youth league. She remained standing, although bleeding profusely, when another murderer shot her a third time and she fell.

It would be possible to relate many more incidents of heroism and resistance, but it can't really be done in a letter. One thing is clear, that our fathers, our brothers, our sisters and our dear friends fell heroically in an unfair battle. It is even clearer that we must take revenge, otherwise we are not worthy of living in this world.

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[153] This account differs from others in the yizkor book. Wolpe (p.232) and Shlapobersky-Ratner (p.238), write that Tzadok had bitten another Lithuanian, named Raudonis. Chaim Ronder (p.289) writes that Tzadok attacked the German officer and that Lithuanians came to help the latter.

Because I can't write about this resistance to everyone, I ask you to relate this to all our fellow citizens for remembrance, so that they all should know how our Jews from Keidan were massacred. Let these small incidents of great heroism spur us on in our struggle against racist antisemites and serve as an example of resistance.

September 26, 1965

I would like to ask you, in the name of our Jews from Keidan who were massacred. In 1944 a blood-soaked murderer, Edvardas Snieška, escaped to America. Many witnesses saw him at the airfield, near the pit, as he was shooting. The murderer Kariunas, who was also shooting and was sentenced to prison (he now lives in Keidan) said, "I did shoot, and Edvardas Snieška stood and shot next to me."

The murderer Snieška was born in 1920. He studied at the Kultur Technikum, His father had a metal workshop. He now lives a good life in America. He is walking free and hasn't been punished. His address is: 1918 Chandler Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In 1964 he took his mother Alexandra to America. His brother, Antanas Snieška also escaped to America. He is a doctor and lives in Brooklyn, 28 East Foch House.

Never forget! Fascist murderers must be punished. That is what our mothers and our children cry out from the grave...

September 21, 1966

I am sending you four photographs from Keidan in a separate envelope. A gathering took place there this year. Many flowers were laid. I also spoke and denounced the murderers who have either not been punished or have been let off with light sentences.

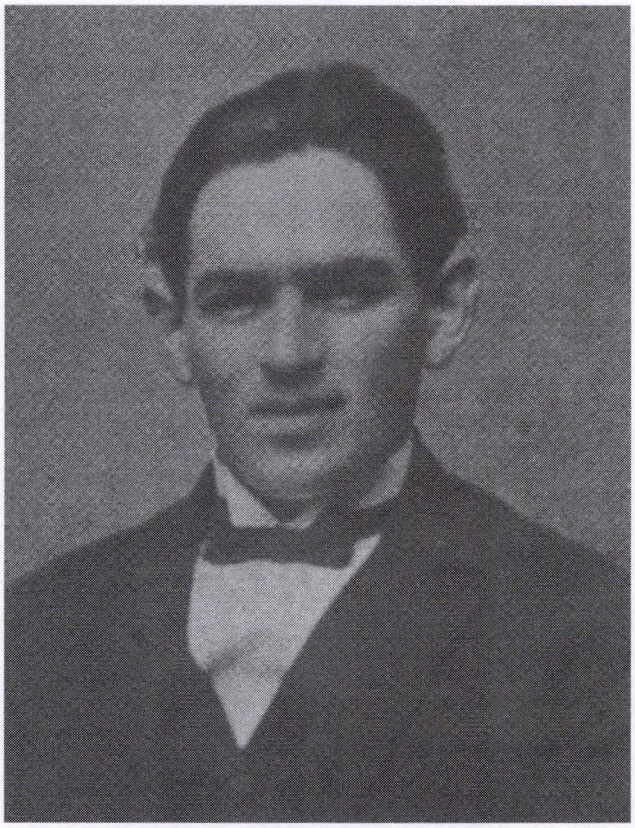
I have just heard about another murderer, a former Kultur Technikum student, Juozas Maleckas, who now lives in Kovno.

July 16, 1968

I have found a few more photos from Keidan from bygone days, in which a few musicians from Yankel's orchestra appear. I collect material about Keidan's Jews and these pictures are a treasure to me. I will pay for any other pictures I receive, as I am eager to collect them.

I found one picture of Yanuk, the firefighter, who participated in the slaughter of the Jews. Yanuk is standing in this picture next to Tzadok Shlapobersky ... the murderer is pictured with his victim, with our hero Tzadok. Yanuk is now a pensioner, living the good life. Dozens of murderers of our brothers and sisters still walk about freely.

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Tzadok Shlapobersky



Chaim Ronder


Our Slogan:

BUY BONDS! BUNDLES FOR KEIDAN!

The KEIDANER

דער קיידאנער

and the KEIDANER LADIES AID SOCIETY

Monthly Bulletin Published by the Keidaner Association and the Ladies' Aid Society of Keidan

א. נ.

בזה מתכבדים אנו להזמין את כבודו לקחת חלק
בשמחתנו

„חתונת־הזהב"
(1879 - 1929) — יובל החמישים

שתהיה ביום הראשון 18 לחדש אוגוסט שנת 1929
(י"ב לחדש אב, תרפ"ט) בשעה 8 בערב.

בכבוד רב
משפחת כהן.

ג. ה.

דער־מיט האבן מיר דעם כבוד אייך אייבצולאדן צום
יום־טוב פון אונזער

„גאלדענע־חתונה"
פופציק יאריקער יובילוי (1879-1929)

וועלכע וועט פאָרקומען זונטיק, דעם 18 אוגוסט
(י"ב לחדש אב תרפ"ט) 8 אזייגער אינאוונט.

מיט האכאכטונג
פאמיליע כהן.

הכתבת לטלגרמות: *Z. Kaganai, Kedainiai Lithuania*

A page from the monthly bulletin published by the Keidaner Association of New York, with invitation (in Hebrew and Yiddish) to the Kagan family's golden wedding anniversary celebration:

Dear Sir,

We are honored to invite you to take part in the joyous celebration of our golden wedding – 50th anniversary (1879-1929), which will take place Sunday Aug. 18, 1929 at 8 p.m.

Respectfully yours,

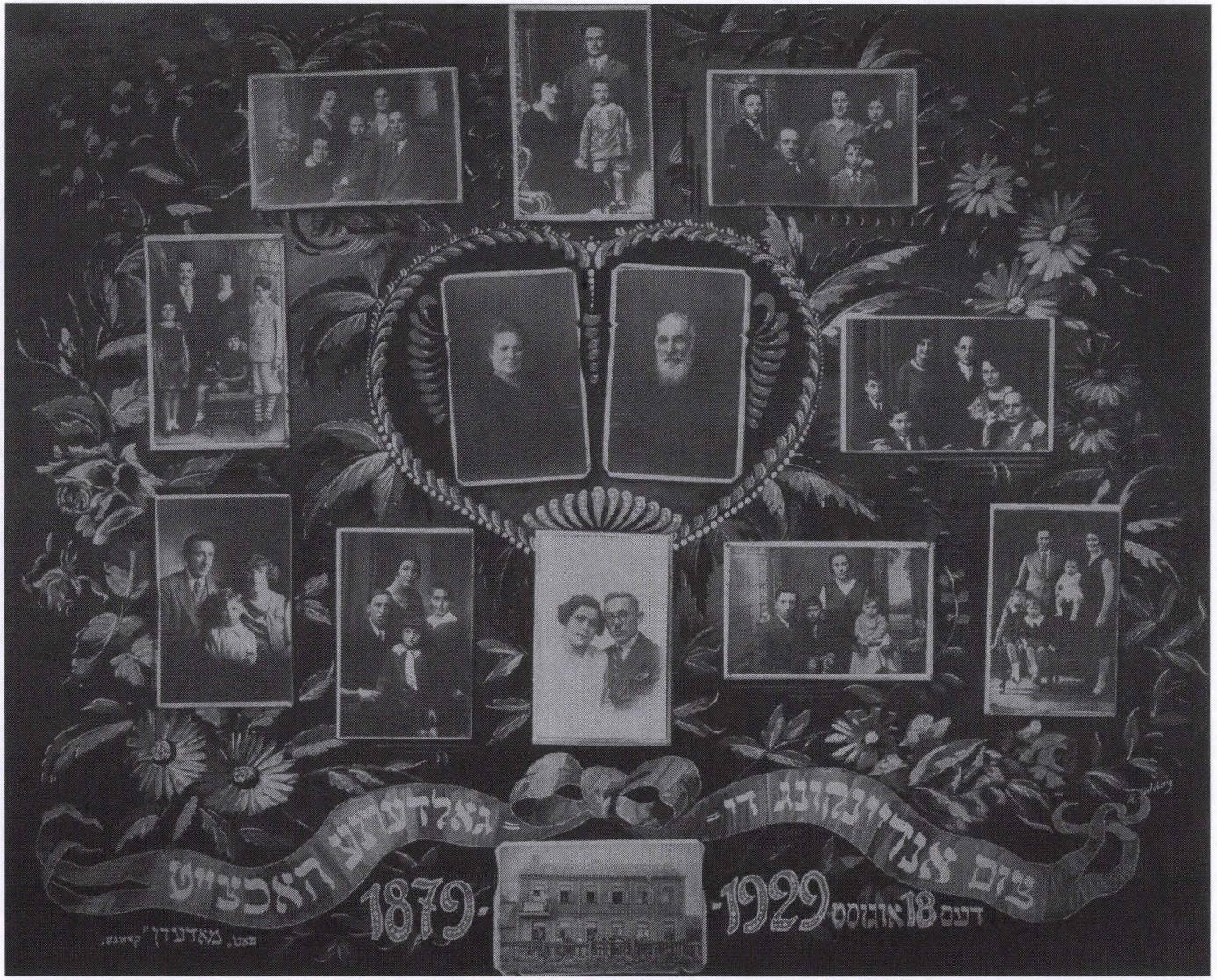
Kagan Family

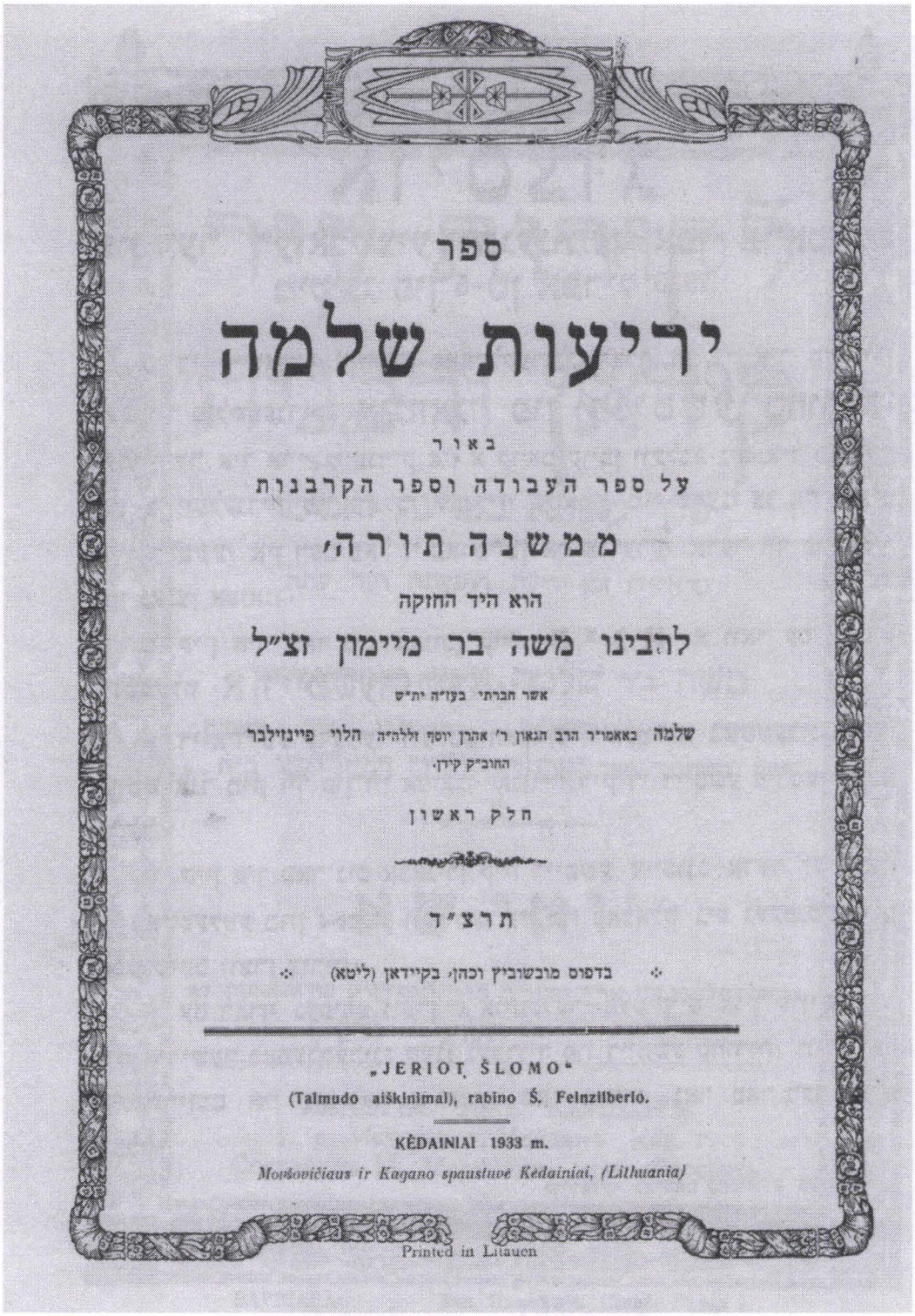
Address for telegrams: Z. Kagan, Kedainiai, Lithuania

See the photo of this event on the next page.

The photo of the whole Kagen family at the celebration of the golden wedding – 50th anniversary (1879-1929), which took place Sunday Aug. 18, 1929 at 8 p.m.

This Kagans family photo was printed in both - NY 1930 book and SA 1950 booklet.





Cover page of a book printed in Keidan in 1933 *"Yeriot Shlomo"*
A commentary on a *Mishneh Torah* chapter concerning worship and sacrifices,
by Rabbi Moshe Bar Maimon (the "Rambam") of blessed memory.
Composed, with God's help, by Shlomo Halevy Feinsilber, a son of his Master, Father,
Teacher and Rabbi, a man of great knowledge, R. Aharon Yosef.
Residing within the community of Keidan.
Keidan, 1933, printed by Movshovitz and Kagan, Keidan (Lithuania)

IŠTRAUKA IŠ REZOLIUCIJOS, PRIIMTOS ANT PROTESTO-MITINGO 5. IV. 1933.

אויסצוג

פון דער רעזאליוציע אנגענומען אפן פראטעסט מיטינג פון 5-טן אפריל 1933.

1) די קיידאנער אידישע באפעלקערונג דארף זיך בייַ איר טעגליכן געברויך פולשטענדיק **אנטזאגן פון דייטשע סחורות**. יעטווידער איד אריינגייענדיק אין א קראם קויפן וועלכע ניט איז סחורה און צווייפלענדיק פון וועלכז לאנד זי שטאמט מוז פרעגז צו איז זי ניט קיין דייטשע, אין דעם פאל זי פארבייטן אף אנדערע, אדער זיך פון איר אין גאנצן אפזאגן.

2) קיין איד טאר ניט באזוכן קיין **קינא** א וואו עס ווערט געשטעלט **א דייטשער בילד**.

3) די אירישע קרעמער וועלכע האבז שיין געמאכט באשטעלונגען איז דייטשלאנד מוזן זיך פון זיי אפזאגן, אנווייזנדיק די דייטשע פירמען דעם גרונד.

4) קיין איד טאר ניט אבאנירן קיין דייטשע צייטונג אדער זשורנאלי די באשטעלטע מוזן אפילו וועז פאר זיי איז באצאלט ניט געעפנטערהייט אפגעשיסט ווערן צוריק.

5) עס דארף געפירט ווערן א אויפקלער-טעטיקייט אוך צווישן דער ניט אידישער באפעלקערונג קעגז געברויך פוז דייטשע סחורות, ווייל דער היטלעריזם איז ניט נאר א געפאר פאר אידז, נאר פאר דער וועלט בכלל.

קיידאנער באיקאט קאמיטעט געגן דייטשע סחורות.

M. ir K. sp. Kėdainiuose.

Extract from the resolution taken at the protest meeting of April 5, 1933

1) The Jewish population of Keidan must in their daily use completely refuse all German products. Every Jew who enters a store to buy any product, who is in doubt about which country it comes from, must inquire whether it comes from Germany, and if it is must choose another, or simply do without.

2) No Jew may attend the cinema if it is showing a German picture.

3) Yiddish storekeepers who have already ordered merchandise from Germany must refuse it, and notify their German suppliers of the reason.

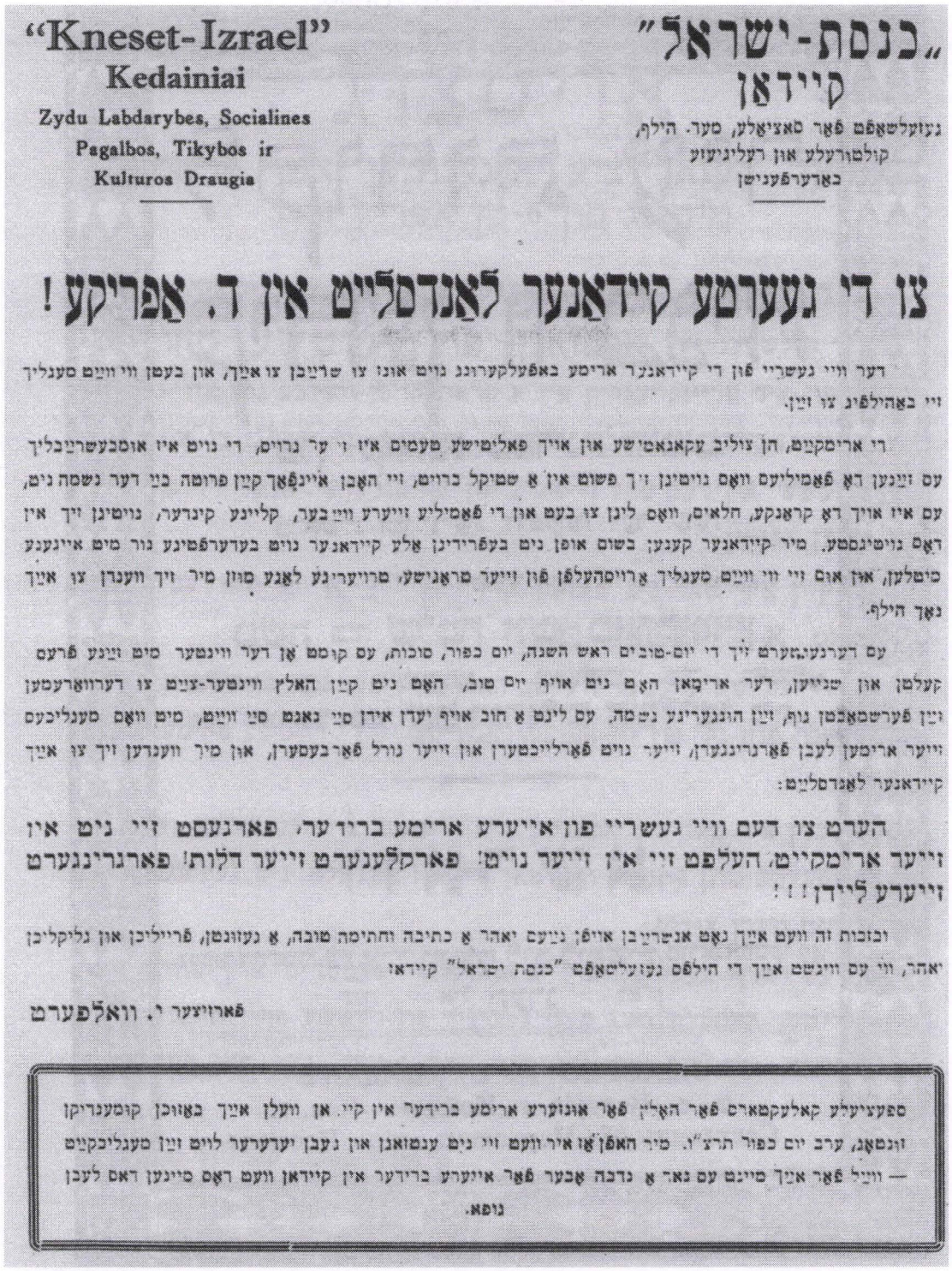
4) No Jew may subscribe to a German newspaper or magazine.

5) An effort should be made to encourage the non-Jewish population not to use German products, because Hitlerism is not only a danger to Jews, but to the entire world.

Keidan Committee to Boycott German Products.


לקורות עיר
קידאן ורבניה
פלך קאונא במדינת זאמוט
מראשית זמן ידיעת הנפעתה ועד עתה
מאתי
משה בר״ד שלמה זלמן מארקאוויץ
מילידי עיר נאמאקסט ומתושבי עיר ראסין
בעל המחבר ספר שם הגדולים השלישי ב״ח.
וואר שא
בדפוס החשמלי ע״י ארי׳ יהודה ליב ליפשיץ מוראנאווסקי 47
שנת איל תערג לפ״ק
ЛЕКОРЕС ИРЪ КЕЙДАНЪ
т. е. Исторія г. Кейданъ Ков. г.
Составилъ М. Марковичъ, изъ Россіенъ
ВАРШАВА Тип. Пикенъ и. Швабе Сѣрак 4

Cover page of a book
A history of the town of Keidan and its Rabbis,
In Kovno (Kaunas) province, region of Zamut (Žemaitija),
From its first appearance to the present day
Compiled by Moshe, son of the Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Markovich
born in the town of Namokshт (Nemakščiai) and living in the town of Rasein (Raseiniai) who compiled the book "The third book of Great Names". Warsaw
Printed at the house of Ari Yehuda Leib Lifshitz, Moranavski street 47 (1912)



"Kneset-Izrael"
Kedainiai
Zydu Labdarybes, Socialines
Pagalbos, Tikybos ir
Kulturos Draugia

„כנסת-ישראל"
קיידאַן
געזעלשאַפט פֿאַר סאציאַלע, מער. הילף,
קולטורעלע און רעליגיעזע
באדערפֿענישן

צו די געסטע קיידאַנער לאַנדסלײַט אין ד. אַפֿריקע!

דער וויי געשרייַ פֿון די קיידאַנער אריסע באפֿעלקערונג גוים אונז צו שרײַבן צו אײַך, און בעטן וויי ווײַט סענלײַך זיי באַהילפֿיג צו זײַן.

די אריסקײַט, הן צוליב עקאנאמישע און אויך פּאליטישע סיבות איז ווי ער גרויס, די גוים איז אומבעשרײַבלײַך עס זײַנען דאָ פֿאַמיליעס וואָס גוטסיגן זיך פּשוט אין אַ שמיקל ברויט, זיי האבן אײַנפֿאַך קײַן פּרומה כּיי דער נשמה גיט, עס איז אויך דאָ קראַנקע, חלאים, וואָס לינן צו בעט און די פֿאַמיליע ווייַבער, קליינע קינדער, גוטסיגן זיך אין דאָס גוטסינסטע. מיר קיידאַנער קענען בשום אופן גיט בעפֿרידיגן אַלע קיידאַנער גוים בעדערפֿענישן גור מיט אייגענע כּוחלעך, אין אום זיי ווייַט סענלײַך אַרויסהעלפֿן פֿון וויי מראַגישע, טרויעריגע לאַגע סוין מיר זיך וועגדן צו אײַך נאָך הילף.

עס דערנענטערט זיך די יום-טובים ראש השנה, יום כּפּור, סוכות, עס קומט אַן דער ווינטער מיט זײַנע פֿרעסט קעלטן און שנייען, דער אריקאַן האָט גיט אויף יום טוב, האָט גיט קײַן האַלץ ווינטער-צײַט צו דערוואַרעמען זיך פֿערשאַפֿטן גוף, זיך הונגעריג נשמה. עס ליגט אַ חוב אויף יעדן אידן סך נאָכּט סיי ווײַט, מיט וואָס מעגליכעם וויער אריסען לעבן פֿאַרנינגערן, וויער גוים פֿאַרליבטערן און זייער נורל פֿאַרבעסערן, און מיר וועגדן זיך צו אײַך קיידאַנער לאַנדסלײַט:

הערט צו דעם וויי געשרייַ פֿון אייערע אריסע בריד ער, פֿארגעסט זיי גיט אין זייער אריסקײַט, העלפֿט זיי אין זייער נויט! פֿארקלענערט זייער דלות! פֿארגרינגערט זייערע לײַדן!!!

ובזכות זה וועט אײַך נאָך אנשרײַבן אויפֿן גלעם יאהר אַ כתיבה וחתימה טובה, אַ געזונטן, פֿרייליכן און גליקליכן יאהר, וויי עס וויגשט אײַך די הילפֿס געזעלשאַפֿט "כנסת ישראל" קיידאַ:

פֿארזיצער י. וואלפֿערט

סבעציעלע קאלעקטאָרס פֿאַר האַלץ פֿאַר אונזערע אריסע בריידער אין קיי. אן וועלן אײַך באַווכן קומענדיקן זונטאָג, ערב יום כּפּור תרצ"ו. מיר האָפֿן אז איר וועט זיי גיט ענטוואנן און נעבן יעדערער לויט זײַן מעגליכקײַט — ווײַל פֿאַר אײַך סיינט עס נאר אַ נדבה אבער פֿאַר אייערע בריידער אין קיידאן וועט דאָס סיינען דאס לעבן נופֿא.

A letter from "Knesset-Israel" Keidan Charitable Help Society for Social, Cultural and Religious Services addressed to fellow Keidaners in South Africa. Translation follows on next page

Translation of letter on previous page

"Knesset-Israel"
Keidan Charitable Help Society for Social, Cultural and Religious Services

To our worthy fellow Keidaners in South Africa:

The cries of woe from Keidan's poor population drive us to write and beg you to be as helpful as you can.

The poverty, which has both economic and political causes, is very great, the need is indescribable. There are families here that lack even a crust of bread, that have not a single coin to their souls. There are also the sick, those lying in bed with their wives and small children among the neediest. We Keidaners can in no way meet all of the needs with only our own resources, and to improve as much as possible their sad, tragic condition we must turn to you for help.

The holidays of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot are approaching, and winter is coming, with its frosts, cold and snow. The poor will have no Holy Days, no wood for winter to warm their weakened bodies and hungry souls. It is the duty of every Jew with the means to do so, whether near or far, to ease their lives, lighten their poverty and better their fates, and so we turn to you, our fellow Keidaners:

Hear your poor brothers' cries of woe, don't forget them in their poverty, aid them in their need, lessen their burden!

And for your merits, may God inscribe you in the book of life for a healthy, happy and fortunate year, so wishes the Aid Committee of the Keidan "Knesset Israel."

I. Wolpert, chairman

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Special collectors for our poor brothers in Keidan will visit you this coming Sunday, Yom Kippur eve, 5696 (1935). We hope you will not turn away, and that each will give according to his ability — because it's not just a donation, for your brothers in Keidan it means life itself.



Sarah Leah Shlapobersky (Oiryo)



Chaim Leib Oiryo.

Sarah Leah Shlapobersky (Oiryo)

The daughter of Gitl and Eliyahu, born in Keidan in 1906. She studied in the Russian school and learned bookkeeping. She worked as a bookkeeper until she made *aliya* in 1935. In Eretz-Israel she worked at the "Liber" factory until her retirement. She passed away in Ramat-Gan in 1976.

She was modest, was not talking much, but had high moral standards. She felt strong affection and love for everyone connected to Keidan and contributed much to bring this book – intended to preserve the memory of the Jewish community of Keidan – to print.

She did not live to see the book appear, and this page will serve as a memorial to this great woman. May her memory be blessed.

Chaim Leib Oiryo

Husband of Sarah Leah, Chaim Leib Oiryo, was born in December 1899, in Iasi (east Romania). They met in Israel as Holocaust survivors. Chaim's long suffering left its marks on him. He survived an infamous pogrom in Iasi, moved to Bucharest and in 1948 was among the first Romanian immigrants to make aliya.

He came to Israel "to rest, not to farm." His life was modest, he made his living honestly through hard manual labor until his last day. For a long time he worked in a bakery, and later worked for the water department of Ramat Gan municipality. In this modest position he welcomed and helped everybody. He passed away, after a long illness and a great deal of suffering, on June 28,1968. May his memory be blessed.



Keidaner Association Ladies Committee in Johannesburg



Keidaner Association Committee in Johannesburg

A Flag Comes Home After 16 Years *Keidan Yizkor Book, p. xxxiv*

Originally published in Israel Horizons, Dec. 1956.

Miracles can happen even to a flag.

Recently, the flag of *Gdud Maapilim*, of *Ken Keidani* of *Hashomer Hatzair*, was brought to Israel, the only flag of the Lithuanian youth movement to have been saved. It was brought to Israel by Moshe Kagan[154], now of New York, who was a delegate of Mapam[155] to the World Zionist Congress.

Moshe Kagan, who hails from Keidan, was a member of *Hashomer Hatzair* from his early youth. He writes:

"In 1940, as the Russians were entering Lithuania, and the Zionist movement ordered all its branches moved underground, I succeeded in getting an exit permit for the United States, via Sweden. I had only a short time to prepare for the trip. I knew that I would not return to Lithuania and that all Zionists, including the Hashomer Hatzair movement, would not renew their work again. I decided to save whatever I could (I had but a small suitcase with me). I took the flag of my group, some books of the movement and the collected works of Borochov, and began my journey. I decided then that I would carry the flag to Israel with my own hands."

Now, sixteen years later, Kagan has fulfilled his vow. The meeting after twenty-five years between the members of Kibbutz Bet Zera, of the Lithuanian movement, and Kagan, was a moving experience. As the flag was unfurled and the date of 1933 appeared, many memories and thoughts came back to the gathering. They remembered their youth movement in Lithuania and the Jewish people there who also are no more.

The flag will be kept in Kibbutz Bet Zera as an exhibit in a room dedicated to the martyrs of Keidan.

The kibbutz has decided to plant trees in the Jewish National Fund forest in the name of Moshe Kagan, for the sixteen years during which he guarded with devotion this flag.

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[154] Moshe (Martin) Kagan, 1920-2012, Progressive Zionist leader and activist in the U.S. and Israel.

[155] Israeli political party, organized in 1948 out of socialist-Zionist movements including *Hashomer Hatzair, Poalei Zion* and others. Strongly rooted in the *kibbutz* movement during its early years.

Poems of Keidan

שירים מקיידאן

My Town, Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book, pp. 299-306*
Nathan Berger (Meyer Yanusevers)

Originally published in the 1950 anniversary booklet of the Keidaner Society of Johannesburg. Translated by Andrew Cassel.

With simple words, in a few score lines
I will set down, to preserve the memory
of how a town endured for generations,
how Jews lived during the twenties.

About a town that was once in Lithuania,
with woods and fields, green without end.
A town with people, a lot of them Jews,
although it was certainly no big city.

With its three rivers, three mills, and a nobleman's orchard,
a train that used to stop twice a day
tooting its whistle to announce its arrival from far parts
to the town three kilometers away.

With cement sidewalks, the streets were paved.
A fire brigade mustered and
practiced, hoping for the chance
to put out a blaze in some peasant's barn.

Boys and girls would go walking together
on the town bridge or in the Borer woods.
Couples in love would express their affection
on grassy lawns in the town's fields.

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Keidan was a Jewish town
that had acquired a reputation across the world.
Famous rabbis and scholars
were born, lived and died there.

A "Jacob's Well" society, a "Bachelors' Crown" group,
Rabbis gave lectures in the yeshiva.
There were "*Yavne*" and "*Tarbut*" and the government high schools
The Maccabee club, Hashomer Hatzair and even Bundists.

And in the old prayer house, at the center of the town
more happened than sermons and prayers to God
there Zundl Ginzburg, the *gabbai*, distributed *aliyas*
and the Tailors' Society elected cantors.

Jews would come there to hear the latest news
Meetings were held to vote yay or nay
(since arguments broke out often
some siding with the rabbi, others with the judge.)

...

And a lot happened all around town
There was a market each Thursday, a fair every year.

The town would rumble like Shlapobersky's mill,
People bought horses, and livestock, and pigs' bristles.

Moshe the hatter would be sewing away,
Nissan the potter would be turning his wheel,
and Moteh the blacksmith would hammer and hammer
making shoes for the horses and plows for the fair.

And Jewish tailors and shoemakers and tinsmiths
in wooden houses with shingled roofs.
Lived and worked day and night,
Jewish artisans, making a simple living...

Gentile peasants and women came into town
bringing fowl and corn and seeds
to Leyzer Buksnevsky and Meyer Yanusover
who dealt in grain, in flax and eggs.

In the shops and stalls that covered the market square
pins and needles and mirrors were sold,
buttons and beads to red-faced peasant girls
who'd been out guzzling beer with their menfolk.

Grune's hotel was well known
for its gefilte fish and its delicious pickles.
She delighted many a merchant and noble
who stopped in on their way back from the big city.

Drivers would rattle their wagons over the cobblestones.
Yude-Bereh-Lafer would yell curses their way,
a broom in his hand all day,
sweeping and sweeping after each horse went by.

***

Jewish peddlers would come around
on foot or with wagons over foot-paths and trails,
accompanied by the sun and the song of the corn
as they passed by decorated crosses on faraway roads.

There were no factories, just three mills
No large workshops, just one printing press
(Actually, there was one small plant
where Moshe Milner made seltzer and lemonade.)

But instead of the workshops or large factories
God hadn't neglected us; he provided
green cucumbers
which were renowned over the whole nation.

Gentile women, from villages and town
From dawn to dusk, for two *lits* per day,
dug the earth and planted enough --
from Monday to Monday, working all the week long.

The priest would rail, the rabbi would preach
Sunday is sacred! You must keep Shabbat!

Addressing them like sheep who had wandered astray
A generation bent on sin, a world that is evil...

But half the town lives from this work
the entire summer long, and in winter, God bless!
They pickle the cucumbers and lay them away
with the stores of potatoes and cabbage.

And when winter's frosts fill up the roads,
when ice spreads over the Smilga and Neviazhe
the garden-keepers linger by the study house stove
while Kalmen the Pipe tells stories

of demons, thieves or even drunkards
who prey on Jews, causing grief
of spirits not long ago brought to the grave
that return from the river each Saturday night.

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On the eve of Pesach the town felt renewed,
Jews in the town felt freer.
Jewish children were released from *cheder*
Jewish children played happily.

Houses were whitewashed, basements were scoured,
clean sand was spread over kitchen floors.
Pipes in the bathhouse hissed with steam
as people carried their matzos home.

Meyer Zaverukhe greased the wheels
of a carriage that had transported nobility
All winter long they had lain idle
while sleighs traveled over the snowy roads.

Modest maidens now blushed as they looked
at the young Jewish men they'd known as children
who now returned from the yeshivas of Telz or Slobodka
to enjoy the holiday in their home town.

The synagogue yard is full, *keyn ayn-hora*, with Jews.
Jews head for afternoon prayers in the shul
wearing shoes instead of boots, new suits of clothes,
summer coats instead of fur wraps.

A clean hand towel hangs by the door
for holiday washing up.
Candlesticks, newly polished, give off bright light
and people's faces shine.

Windows opened, Jews take delight
in the breeze blowing into the study house.
It smells like spring, with the beloved holiday
with matzo, with mead and with Passover wine.

***

Thus Jews lived there for generations and years
Until one day a wicked official came riding in
from Kovno, the big city,
issuing many evil decrees

He made lists, wrote out orders,
drove the market out of the town center;
and in place of the brick market
installed a park...

And the priest in the church preached hatred:
"Jews, be damned and go to Palestine!"
And the assistant town-master was also unfriendly:
Day in, day out, he harassed the Jews.

The priest preached and the authorities incited:
"The Jews' properties are all mortgaged,
the nobililty's impoverished, the gentiles are enslaved
Young Christian girls work as their servants!"

Hundreds of Jews, due to instability and poverty
leave the town, spreading all over the world.
People send their children off to strange lands:
To America, to Africa and also to Palestine.

The older generation is the one remaining.
The young have departed from there permanently.
Poverty has driven them away from the town
to find new homes across the sea.

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But that Litvak town cannot be forgotten.
You've cut back on clothes, cut back on food,
exiled yourself to work among blacks on the Rand.
You were so green when you first arrived.

Everyone dreamt of those still in the town
while working hard from morning til night,
and of saving a little money after a few years
to bring the wife and children to Africa.

A society was founded here – people came together
to share all that was known about the folks back home.
Keidan still had an address: you could write
and hear of all the trouble and pain happening there.

Its children did not forget their home Keidan
They eased the burdens that oppressed the town:
Money and packages of food and clothing
and visas for relatives were sent.

We supported the synagogue, sent Passover charity
repaired the broken fence around the cemetery,
Sent young women there to find husbands
with trousseaus and dowries for their sisters...

And today the Lithuanian town still exists
with its Christian church, cemetery and cloister.
But Jews? In the town that calls itself Keidan?
There are no more Jews in Keidan!

Jewish property has been seized by gentiles.
Gentile families occupy Jewish houses.
The prayer-house doors are all boarded up
and Jewish children have dispersed.

An entire heroic community was brought low
in town by the Nazis, in the woods by starvation.
The gravestones stand witness
to the town's streets and fields.

There is no more Jewish Keidan in Lithuania.
Only its people remain to say *kaddish*
for its cruelly slaughtered residents.
Great is the tragedy, the wound is still fresh!

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My Youth in Keidan *Keidan Yizkor Book p. 307*

Hirsh Bloshtein

Translated by Andrew Cassel

My youth in Keidan, come back to me,
I just want to hear your voice once more
It's not yet time to say the final "stop"
and cut the string for once and all.

While I'm still unbeaten there's still a final hour
At night I hear it, like a creaking at the door
And Smilga Street comes in to me
And all is as it was, and wasn't before;
And I'm back with the boys, running wide and free.

Through our beloved street, we dream together
and, like our hearts, our heads too are still young
And it's all very good, and very bad
in all the familiar and unfamiliar nights
when my hands push back the distant years
My Keidaner "boys" come back to me!

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Mama *Keidan Yizkor Book p. 308*
David Wolpe

Translated by Andrew Cassel

Nineteen forty-one. May
In Lithuania the sun is molten with red lead

Father says, with sadness in his face, that
Mother, unfortunately, is lying in hospital

I waited not a tiny moment,
but quickly strode away there on foot.

The sight of Mother's face pierced my heart
And her hair a white-hot burning fright

Disheveled like a sick bird, weak
She managed to punch a hole in me.

Brightly shone her childlike blue gaze
Shining for that sunlit hour

Dovidl ... her voice whispered
I did not know it would be the last time

"Mamaleh" I said the word
In my bones the sound echoed

I stood beside Mother's bed
I still feel her last stirring

A kiss. She asked me for nothing more
And that tragic image stayed with me on my journey

It has stayed in my eye, frozen
and will not let my heart rest.

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My Brother *Keidan Yizkor Book p 309-310*
H. Bloshtein (Tchernowitz)

(First published in the anthology "Horizons" in Moscow in 1965. The poem was composed after the author's visit to the mass grave in Keidan.) Translated by Andrew Cassel

- In memory of my brother, Mani-Yosl, the wondrous storyteller.

At night or by day, when I am alone
My brother, the older one, often appears
From my birthplace in "Lita" my *shtetl* Keidan
Where only an enormous grave is left now
That he himself dug with only his hands
And where he and thousands of others now lie
His final cry still shuddering in his mouth
As the German bullet shatters his skull.
Yet right now my brother stands by my side
His eyes are two caverns with faraway fires
Blood curdles over his ancient grey beard
He stands and he looks, and he says not a word.

And as I look, quivering with a sudden pain,
My brother's form multiplies; now there are two
One stands to my left, and one to my right
And over us in the air hangs a choked cry
Like a sudden cramp that has been cut off
I stride 'cross the room; they both speak to me
And both of them put on my own body's form
I climb with them up to the execution spot
I throw myself down with them into the pits
And feel the hair on my head turning grey

And my brother says often: You likely remember
You, the last branch of a family cut down
How I used to lead you by hand as a child
And spin for you hundreds of wondrous tales
About shining palaces built all of water...
All this I recalled in the moment of death!

Recall how on midsummer evenings, I used
To tell you such stories without end or break
I laid them like bricks, putting word upon word
And instantly palaces rose there back then.
Other Jews sat around, occupied but attentive,
their mouths half agape as they stroked on their beards
This past is no more, no it will not return!
The palace is ruined, the fire has gone out.
The needle goes in and the needle comes out,
No more Mani-Yosl. The story is done!

O, brother! There's pain in my eyes, that is clear!
But your palace of dreams has now become real.
We have one foot over the threshold, it's true
The heavens are clearing, the horizon is bright
And wondrous indeed is the time of our lives

And oh how it hurts me that you are not here!
Your heart would rejoice like a child's if you were
And the green of our spring would refresh your old age.

My brother hears silently all that I say
And deep in one eye, as from a dark cave
A small flame is kindled, a brighter flame burns
As it did in those times when he listened to song
Nu, brother, chime in with your heartwarming voice
Give us all another "Once upon a time..."
My brother would smile, but his mouth cannot
Since the German bullet shattered his skull.

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Keidaner Associations

ארגונים של יוצאי קיידאן

The Keidaner Association in the States *Keidan Yizkor Book, p xxxv*

Charles Lipshitz, President, Keidaner Association of New York

I left Keidan in 1907, shortly after my Bar Mitzvah as a student in the Keidan yeshiva.

A short time after my arrival in the United States, I learned that there is a Keidaner organization in existence. I did not join the Keidaner Association then, because I gave all my spare time to the Zionist cause, belonging to more than one Zionist club and organization.

But in 1929, I took a trip to Keidan to visit with my family. There and then, I learned a great deal about the Keidaner Assn. The people in charge of the Keidaner orphans invited me to a luncheon and I was told that the Keidaner orphans are maintained and supported by the Keidaner Ladies Auxiliary of New York.

At that luncheon, there were a number of leading Keidaner who told me of the great strife and struggle Keidan is living through, and they requested of me that upon my return to New York, I should contact the Keidaner Assn. and tell the members that Keidan could be helped by receiving a substantial sum of money for the purpose of organizing a stronger Loan Association which was already in existence. I promised them that I would do everything in my power to help them.

A few weeks after my return to New York, the Keidaner Assn. called a special meeting in order to listen to a living regard from Keidan. At that special meeting, I had the pleasure to speak to my Keidaner for the first time, and it seems that my words and analysis of Keidan made a deep impression, because a committee was appointed the same evening headed by Dr. Hyman Epstein for the purpose of raising a special fund for that Loan Assn. And right there at that meeting, someone proposed me to become a member of the Keidaner Assn. and I did, and ever since then, I am in active service of the Keidaner Assn. for the past 42 years.

The Keidaner Assn. born in 1900, like many other thousands of *landsmanshaftn*, was organized for the sole purpose and aim of fraternity, cooperation and assistance in case of need. The *landsmanshaftn* contributed a great deal to the life of the immigrant, who entered a new country, a new language and a life completely different than the little *shtetl* where he was born. Although the HIAS[156] was in existence and gave a great deal of assistance to every Jewish immigrant that needed help, yet it was the Fraternal Organization that that gave him the warm greeting and the friendship he needed. Many, many thousands obtained jobs through the help of their organization for their livelihood.

And as the years rolled by, American Jewry grew in the millions by immigrants and otherwise. It became the world's greatest Jewish Community with many thousands of organizations of a different character than the *landsmanshaftn* and that kept on until the Hitler Holocaust.

To a certain extent, we knew that many thousands of our brethren were dying, but no one expected that six million of our beloved were massacred.

The Keidaner Assn. during the Second World War realized that after the war will be over, our little Keidan will be in great financial need. I then proposed to establish a Post War Relief Fund so that when the war will be over, we will have a substantial amount of money for immediate help. When the war ended, to our painful regret we found out that Keidan is completely destroyed and that there was no one to be helped. But that did not stop the Keidaner Assn. in continuing their effort by appealing to its members for more money to the Post War Relief Fund, because we felt that our duty and responsibility will increase by many folds.

Instead of Keidan, we will have to think and assist our brethren in many parts of the world due to the catastrophe that happened to our European Jewry. We did our best.

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[156] Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Shortly after, when the United Nations found advisable and voted for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine and the Declaration of Independence, once again the thoughts and responsibility of the Keidaner Assn. as well as the entire American Jewry changed. The Keidaner Assn. more than doubled its efforts to raise money through banquets and theater benefits etc., and as President of the Keidaner Assn. I am proud to state that we have fulfilled our responsibility to a great extent and the establishment of the Post War Relief Fund during the Second World War was of great assistance.

Right after the Declaration of Independence, when the need for homes in Israel was urgent due to the great number of immigrants from all over the world, we pledged eight (8) units amounting to $20,000 and in 1952 our pledge was fulfilled. During the years after 1952, we contributed to the UJA substantial amounts every year, and since the Six Day War in 1967, the Keidaner Assn. is contributing through the Emergency Fund of the UJA $1,000 every three months.

We know, that you Keidaner living in Israel are doing your share by building the country in every way culturally as well as economically.

I want to assure you that as long as I am alive and as long as the Keidaner Assn. in New York will be in existence, we will make every effort to assist Israel.

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The Keidaner Association in South Africa *Keidan Yizkor Book p xxxvii*

Max Rochin

After World War I, immediately after the liberation of Lithuania, the Lithuanian government granted the Jews a certain autonomy. A Jewish National Council was set up, yet all this lasted only a short time.

The situation in Lithuania as well as in Keidan deteriorated; there was no employment and no sources of income for people. A big emigration began. People would go to any place in the world. Many young people went to Palestine, many went to South America and many left for South Africa.

Those who went to South Africa and had no relatives in the foreign country, could address themselves to the Keidaner Society with all their problems. The Society took an interest in the problems of each one, helped some of them getting work, assisted others with a loan and arranged for them a livelihood, others received tools and even loans in order to support the wife and the family left behind in Keidan. Medical assistance and medicaments were given to all free of charge, and in this way everyone arranged himself gradually.

In course of time the Society increased, because new townspeople arrived, yet the more townspeople came, the more the situation of the Society became difficult, as it became necessary to help each one and there were no funds. As soon as one person finished to pay his loan, another one applied for help, and the members of the committee had big difficulties in satisfying everybody.

Every Sunday the members of the committee used to go and collect the membership fees, two shillings and six pence a month, and on Monday at the meeting each of them brought with him the money. After the collected money was summed up at the meeting, there was a great joy: it will be possible to pay the doctor, the pharmacy and it will be possible to grant the most urgent loan which an immigrant is already expecting for so long.

At the beginning of 1930 many townspeople came, because in May the immigration was stopped and no more immigrants came from Lithuania and Keidan. The Society had at that time very big difficulties in helping everybody to arrange themselves. The situation in Keidan deteriorated, each one received letters from his father, mother, brothers and sisters with pleas to save them and to send them help. Different institutions wrote to the Society too, that they perish, because the population cannot maintain them. So, for instance, the public bath was burnt and the town remained without a bath. Meetings were arranged but there were no means to rebuild the bath. We held immediately a meeting of all the townspeople and the necessary sum was collected.

Or a public appeal, – there was a big flood which destroyed amongst other things the fence of the cemetery, and it is necessary to fortify the hill, otherwise the graves will collapse and the *Chevra Kadisha* has no money. We had to save and send money. We collected again the necessary funds and sent it to Keidan.

Again a request, – the roof of the big synagogue is decayed and it rains into it, the Scrolls of the Law and the holy books are being damaged. We collected the money and sent it to Keidan.

The town became poor and together with it the people. When Passover approached, there was no possibility to collect "Maot Chitin." Again they appealed to us. Unfortunately there was no unity between the public workers of Keidan. There were two institutions. One of these was the “Kehila” and the other one — “Ezra,” and both of them appealed, and we didn’t know

what to do. The result was that we sent to both institutions and they distributed according to their understanding.

We used to organize two campaigns every year, one for winter to buy timber and the other one for "*Maot Chitin*[157]," and we continued so till the big destruction of the world, which befell the humanity and our beloved Keidan.

During World War II the situation changed completely. Keidan was unfortunately closed and we heard no more from there. Here in South Africa, the townspeople already were a little established, some more some less. We continued with our work. Some of our people still needed loans, and we continued with our system of doctor and medicaments. We also used to come to meetings. We were thinking only about the fate of the Jews in Keidan. During the war we believed that when the war comes to an end, we shall be able again to rebuild Keidan. We began collecting money by different means and we raised a big sum.

Unfortunately there was already no need for funds in Keidan. There were found only a few townspeople in the DP camps in Germany or dispersed all over Russia and in Vilnius. We found all our townspeople and assisted them with hundreds of packages of food and clothing. Our women worked around the clock and they packed and mailed till the camps in Germany became empty, thanks to the State of Israel, where the majority of our townspeople lives today.

We also assisted our townspeople in Israel. We established a loan fund in Israel, which the townspeople in Israel use to their best.

Many townspeople still remained all over Russia and we mailed to them packages and clothing as well as different useful articles, till approximately 1970, when we became informed that they had troubles from the government and we stopped mailing packages to them.

Recently we sent aid to the new immigrants from Russia and we participated in the Memorial Book, which will be an eternal monument for our Keidan.

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[157] Charity distributed at Passover

Keidan and Its Mutual Aid Associations, 1900-2018

by Andrew Cassel and Aryeh Leonard Shcherbakov

Jews have always been absorbed with problems of ethics and morality. Both before and during the diaspora, proper behavior and relations within the family and community have been major concerns, particularly concerning treatment of the weak or less fortunate. "Charity and benevolence are equal to all commandments of the Torah" says the Jerusalem Talmud (*Pe'ah 1:1*). For this reason, voluntary mutual aid and charity organizations have been fixtures in Jewish communities across the centuries and around the globe.

The Jewish community of Keidan was no exception. Over the years, this modest-sized Lithuanian town had become an important economic, cultural and religious center, whose residents took particular pride in their community's lineage. It was thus not surprising to them setting up charity and mutual-aid organizations not only in the town itself, but in virtually every place where Keidaners settled in significant numbers.

The United States and South Africa

Although Keidan was spared the pogroms that devastated many Jewish communities in the Russian empire after Tsar Alexander III took power in 1881, deteriorating economic and social conditions and harsh anti-Jewish policies induced many young Keidaner Jews to emigrate. Others became part of the rapidly spreading socialist and Zionist movements, which aimed in different ways at Jewish liberation and equal rights. By the turn of the twentieth century, hundreds of Keidaners had resettled abroad, most in the United States or South Africa, with some also in Western Europe and South America. Far from their home community and families, these mostly male emigrants turned to each other for familiarity, comfort and support. *Landsmanshaften* – mutual aid societies of people from the same town or region – began to form in the cities where immigrants settled. Among these was the Keidaner Association of New York, formally founded on Sept. 8, 1900. At nearly the same time in Johannesburg, the Keidaner Helping Hand and Benevolent Society was inaugurated. Similar organizations appeared later in Chicago and elsewhere.

Wherever they were formed, the associations had similar aims: to help new arrivals find shelter, work, healthcare and the other basics needed to establish themselves in the new land. Those who came earlier and were already on their own feet provided support in various forms, including a free loan fund and charity drives around major Jewish holidays. Newcomers were helped to start businesses and, eventually, to in turn help their families back in Keidan. This was especially important after Word War I, which sent Keidaners into temporary exile and devastated the town's economy. Until immigration was curtailed by their host countries (1924 in the U.S., 1930 in South Africa), the associations also helped sponsor family members and others who wanted to immigrate. Last but not least, the associations provided a place for social interaction, recreating the hometown culture and fostering a sense of community.

In 1930, the Keidaner Association of New York, by then with some 400 member families, published a thirtieth anniversary book with a history, memoirs and other material about the town. A similar booklet was published in 1950 in Johannesburg. Both publications provide a wealth of historical information, while painting a picture of a united, vital and friendly community.

Palestine

While Keidan was always an important center of Jewish religious life in Lithuania, large-scale emigration to Palestine did not start for religious reasons. As secular education became available to Jews in the 19th century, young people began to dream of a new society based on freedom and equal rights. Some embraced socialism, hoping to transform the Russian Empire into an egalitarian state. But many others became Zionists, convinced that Jews could secure their human rights only in an independent Jewish state. Zionist youth movements ranged from the left-leaning *Hashomer Hatzair* to the right-oriented *Beitar*, but all made their primary goal the creation of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

Poor and undeveloped, Palestine was hardly an attractive destination in those days. Entry was further discouraged by the authorities – Ottoman Turks until 1918, and the British after that. *Aliya* [immigration to Eretz Israel] was largely limited to young people willing to risk illegal entry, or those from well-off families able to overcome the physical, economic and legal obstacles. Once arrived, young men and women mainly took up agriculture – almost the only available occupation in those days, yet something most were unfamiliar with since few Jews had been allowed to own land in Russia. To prepare them to work the land, youth movements in Lithuania created training farms. The first of these was set up in Pelednogy (Pelėdnagiai in Lithuanian), near Keidan in 1922. Young Keidaners and others who learned to work the land there helped to form the core of Israel's *kibbutz* movement, playing leading roles in a number of important *kibbutzim* such as Kfar Masaryk, Ramat Hashofet, Ramat Hakovesh, Beit Zera and others.

Conditions in pre-state Jewish Palestine did not favor the kind of hometown organizations that had grown up in the U.S. and South Africa. The pioneers who settled there focused on building a new Jewish homeland to serve as a refuge for persecuted Jews, not on recreating or memorializing their previous communities. But that changed after the Holocaust.

The End of Jewish Keidan

The German invasion in June 1941, severed communications with Keidan, producing a deep sense of foreboding and helplessness in its emigrant communities abroad. What followed exceeded everyone's worst fears. Lithuania was overrun within days, time enough for only a relative handful of young Keidaners to flee the rapidly advancing Nazi troops. They found shelter in the Soviet Union, where after several months rumors began to arrive of brutal massacres in occupied Lithuania. Even then, few imagined the near-total extermination of a centuries-old Lithuanian Jewish community, carried out with the help of their former neighbors.

Those who had escaped the slaughter or were already abroad suffered great emotional stress. They were consumed by uncertainty and fear for their families until July 1944, when the Germans were finally driven out of Lithuania. The terrible details of Keidan's fate finally began to trickle out via survivors such as Chaim Ronder and a few other Keidaners who had returned to Keidan after the war and learned on the fate of the community and their families from Lithuanian neighbors. One of only three people to escape the mass murder in Keidan, Ronder had spent years hiding and fighting with partisans in the forests around Lithuania. He reported that the entire remaining Jewish population of Keidan – including women, children and the elderly – had been brutally murdered on August 28, 1941.

Practically no trace of a once-flourishing community remained. Whole families were wiped out, leaving no witness or record of their existence. Understandably, none of the few dozens of Keidaners who survived the war returned to their ghost-like hometown. The pain and guilt of those who remained alive while their relatives were slaughtered remained with them until the end of their lives.

Israel

It took a few years after State of Israel was created in 1948 for Keidaners in the newly independent country to organize themselves into the "Mutual Aid Association of Keidaners in Israel." Like the older associations, they aimed to help newcomers – those who had survived the concentration camps, ghettos and forests, or had escaped into Russia (where some had fought with the Red army) and had managed to leave the Soviet Union after the war.

The South African and American Keidaner associations sent money and parcels with clothing and food. Some newcomers received small loans. When the Soviet government began to permit some Jews to leave in the 1970s, the association arranged small scholarships for those pursuing higher education. But for Israeli Keidaners, the main unifying idea was preserving the memory of their destroyed community and lost families. A small museum dedicated to Keidan was created at kibbutz Beit Zera (unfortunately not active today). A plaque commemorating the Jewish community of Keidan was added to the Chamber of the Holocaust on Jerusalem's Mount Zion. A few years later the Keidaner Association of Israel

erected a memorial at the cemetery of Holon, among others dedicated to the exterminated Jewish communities of Europe.

Each year on August 28, Israeli Keidaners gather at this memorial or at the hall of the Association of the Lithuanian Jews in Israel, to remember their families and the whole Jewish community of Keidan. But probably the most important contribution of the association to future generations of Keidaners was the publication of the *yizkor* book "*Keidan – the Book of Memory,"* in 1977. Originally released mostly in Hebrew (with smaller Yiddish and English sections), it has now been fully translated into English. The book offers a multi-faceted historical view of Jewish life in Keidan – its history, its religious, educational, social and cultural institutions, youth organizations, portraits of its prominent people, memoirs of witnesses and survivors, the stories of exiles, wars and the Holocaust.

The present

Nearly all living memory of Jewish Keidan is gone. Of those who immigrated to the U.S. or South Africa, made *aliya* to Eretz Israel or survived the Holocaust, including the creators of this book, very few are still with us. For their descendants, trying to continue the tradition of remembrance and keeping in touch, the task is not simple.

Charity and mutual aid are no longer our prime focus, although in recent years the Israel association has provided help for a wheelchair-bound Keidaner who lost his hands in Siberia, assisted 1990s-era *olim* with roots in Keidan, and even provided some help to descendants of "righteous gentiles" in Lithuania. Keidaners in the U.S. and Israel have assisted the Kedainiai Regional Museum in collecting and verifying the names of Keidan's Jewish martyrs, which since 2011 may be seen on a memorial plaque at the site of the 1941 massacre.

Today we are dispersed all over the country and the world. We know less about each other today than did our parents and grandparents who shared roots in a relatively small town. We have adopted the languages and lifestyles of our various countries. At the same time, technology has made it possible to learn from and communicate with each other from around the globe. Internet sites and social media allow us to share both historical material and current developments relating to our ancestors' community in ways that were not possible when this book was first published.

The new world of communications allows today all Keidaners, no matter where they live, to feel a part of our still-existing community, and to help keep the story alive for future generations. We, the editors of the English edition, invite your participation and thank you for your support.

"There is no relief in this book for the wounded soul of a son of Keidan, but there is in it a eulogy and a kaddish which was not said on the grave of the martyrs, and which will be said now whenever we shall take this book in our hands."

Made in the USA
Columbia, SC
13 January 2024





ISBN 9780994619266